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New Perspectives in African Philosophy

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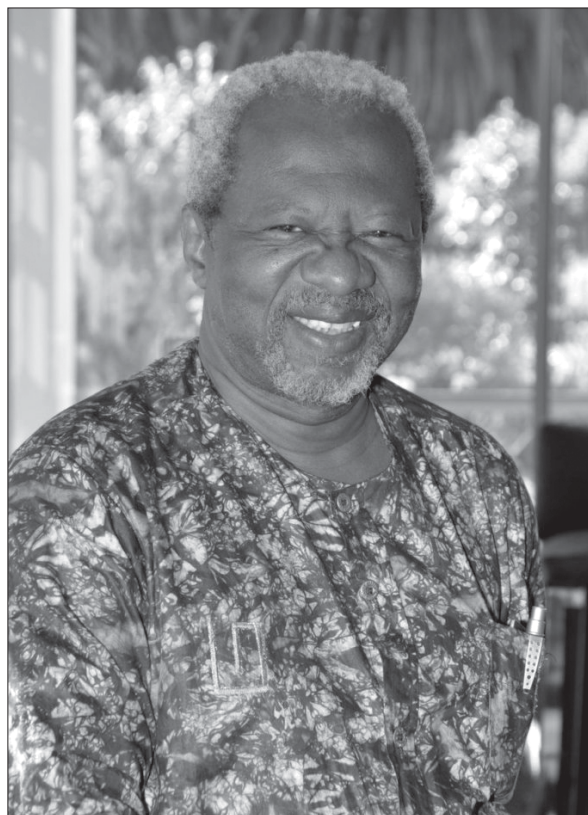
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In the Loving Memory of
Prof. Paulin Jidenu Hountondji
(1942-2024)

Introduction

ADOULOU N. BITANG

The Challenge of this Special Issue

The challenge undertaken by the contributors to this special issue is that of providing the readers with new perspectives regarding African philosophy. This challenge should be read as twofold: on the one hand, as perspectives *about* the field and on the other, as perspectives *within* it.

In the first sense, the new perspectives provided here consider African philosophy as an established discipline and suggest novel and innovative approaches to strengthen, enrich, and widen the scope of the field. In the second sense, the aim is to reread or reassess existing debates and situations within the field itself, focusing primarily on discussing African authors and concepts or political issues related to the African context. In any case, the perspectives offered here share the same feature: they are all original understandings aiming at fostering and furthering discussions about and within African philosophy beyond traditional approaches to this discipline.

Struggling With Tradition

Most contributors have chosen to overtly depart from tradition in examining their objects. However, a careful reader will notice a situation I did not wish to conceal or arbitrarily silence by harmonizing the different argumentative paths followed in this volume.¹ Indeed, although all authors seem to agree on the fact that decolonization is a vital need for philosophy in any considered tradition, meticulous readers might witness that performing the action of decolonizing the philosophical discourse is a highly challenging task because established concepts and conventional wisdom resist this endeavor more or less actively, more or less consciously. And unsurprisingly, the first concept to resist decolonization is that of philosophy itself.

Traditionally—which, to a large extent, also means colonially—philosophical reflection is associated with the higher faculty of knowledge, commonly referred to as ‘reason.’ It is therefore seen as a product of rationality, by which human beings are considered different from non-humans but also from not-quite-human individuals and societies with the vigorous and more or less explicit distinction between civilization and primitivism that also roughly traditionally aligns with the distinction between Europe and all the others.² The historical and academic quarrel over African philosophy initiated in the 1940s proceeded undoubtedly from these premises, whether on the European or the African sides, as some proponents assumed that the term philosophy bears some specific characteristics associated—in proper or not—with the historical and intellectual development of this discipline in Europe, while some opponents challenged this affirmation by claiming a specific, cultural, and racial nature of philosophy, by which this term changes its meaning, signification, and expectations when one moves from one context—whether considered initial or not—to another. On each side, philosophy identifies as the rationalized form that takes on the claim to authenticity: either people—mostly reactionary

in this respect—do not want to share it with others³ or only under specific—and allegedly rigorous—circumstances and conditions,⁴ or people—mostly revolutionary in the same respect and sometimes with regard to their honest and profound ambition—aspire to participate in it as the ultimate expression of their rightful appurtenance to humanity. As such, philosophy unavoidably exerted a remarkable fascination. For the most part, this fascination still plays a decisive role in narrating the history of philosophy and presenting the stakes in African philosophy. Consequently, one can still agree with Kwasi Wiredu that conceptual decolonization is an imperative in contemporary African philosophy (see Wiredu).

The contributors to this volume prove to be aware of what is at stake in traditional concepts and distinctions, especially when applied from the outside to a context and people who were considered, not very far ago, foreign to any kind of rationality and, therefore, to philosophy. The noticeable philosophical tension between decolonizing approaches to concepts, distinctions, ideas, etc., and the maintaining of their original colonial functioning with regard to African philosophy reflects the concrete political tensions these options rest on and carry in their wake. Ultimately, this tension reminds the readers that decolonization is neither a view of the mind invented only by dishonest or lazy intellectual ‘activists’ to bring to the forefront irrelevant issues designed for their personal interests. Nor is it a granted situation whose claimed benefits are already established, following the political account of the concept.

By its form and organization, this volume testifies to the fact that decolonization is an ongoing struggle—not only in African philosophy but in philosophy in general—that none of the authors gathered here would claim to have settled.

Presentation

Evaristus Emeka Isife’s paper opens this special issue by providing a “critical synthesis” of decolonization in African philosophy, examining the corollaries between the two concepts. In its first three sections, the paper offers definitions of crucial concepts: colonialism, decolonization, and African philosophy. The crux of the paper is undoubtedly its penultimate section, where Isife not only identifies crucial areas in urgent need of decolonization in the African context but also suggests what decolonizing these areas would mean and imply. The paper concludes that decolonization is not only a theoretical matter but also touches on social and political institutions. As such, it aims at affirming African voices on the global scene.

The following two papers mainly have a theoretical focus as they seek to open traditional approaches to philosophy to new concepts and influences. Michaela Ott’s paper does this in relation to German philosophy, while Lawrence Ogbo Ugwuanyi advocates for an account of creative arts in African philosophy.

Ott’s paper revisits traditional European perspectives on the person by providing a new paradigm to understand personhood. This new paradigm, which Ott calls *dividuation*, emphasizes that the person is the product of necessary and unavoidable entanglements with others, especially at the social level. As such, the definition of the individual must acknowledge this situation by which an ‘individual’ is never separated from the influence of other individuals. Thus, an individual is directly at the core of a network of interactions that help define their identity. Ott goes on to show, with interesting detail, how this approach to personhood resonates with similar endeavors in African and Antillean philosophy aiming at capturing this particular situation, a view confirmed by a later piece in this volume by Justin Sands.

Lawrence Ogbo Ugwuanyi’s paper takes on a traditionally overlooked aspect of African philosophy, namely its relationship to creative arts. Central to Ugwuanyi’s argument is the idea that creative arts can—and therefore should—inform the African philosophical practice by offering new venues of expression by which creativity can support the development and the vulgarization of philosophy on the continent. With examples taken from the traditional Igbo

intellectual and cultural context, Ugwuanyi shows how philosophical thought and creativity are interrelated and how contemporary African philosophy can use this situation to its benefit to seek popular relevance beyond the academic spheres, which Ugwuanyi poetically refers to as “pen and paper.”

The next group of papers addresses two political issues in Ethiopia and Cape Verde, respectively.

Eskendir Sintayehu Kassaye’s paper is concerned with modernity in Ethiopia and interrogates the significant challenges to democracy and modernization in this country. Kassaye aptly reminds the reader of the debate on tradition and modernity in African philosophy and shows how, to some extent, the same debate persists in contemporary Ethiopian politics, where people disagree about the foundations on which to build Ethiopian political modernity. Drawing intensively on Messay Kebede’s work, Kassaye argues that what hinders the advent of political modernity, namely democracy, in Ethiopia is, on the political level, the resistance to the idea of political membership that transcends traditional criteria, such as ethnicity and religion, and on the practical level, poverty, structural injustices, and the absence of a proper Ethiopian bourgeoisie.

In a sense, Kassaye’s paper interrogates contemporary Ethiopian political identity, which is somewhat what Andrew Bumstead’s paper does in relation to Cape Verde, however, with a clear emphasis on the linguistic aspect of the concept of identity in a postcolonial context. Bumstead examines the sociopolitical content of the two languages spoken in Cape Verde, namely Kriolu and Portuguese, and their interactions in everyday life. Bumstead concludes that those interactions display a postcolonial linguistic crisis in the country, whose origins and manifestations he explores by explaining, for example, the construction of Cape Verde as a Portuguese colony and the birth of Kriolu as a subversive language to resist Portuguese oppression. The paper ends by suggesting a solution to this crisis, namely acknowledging the unique hybridity of Cape Verde’s linguistic and, thus, sociopolitical identity.

The following two articles clarify certain concepts within African philosophy from two different perspectives. The first focuses on traditional philosophical systems in Congo and Nigeria through the Baluba and Yorùbá concepts of *ntu* and *àṣẹ*, while the second examines a modern reappraisal of the Akan conception of personhood by Kwasi Wiredu.

In their paper, Angela Roothaan and Saheed Adesumbo Bello provide a much-welcome genealogical analysis of the concept of ‘vital force’ popularized by Belgian missionary Placide Tempels in his seminal *Bantu Philosophy*. Through a detailed analysis, the paper shows how the concept of ‘vital force’ results from translating original Dutch words employed by Tempels, namely *levenskracht*, *levensterkte*, and *sterkte*. In doing so, Roothaan and Bello renew the scholarship on Tempels, particularly his *Bantu Philosophy*, by addressing the issue of the translation of his work and how the latter affected Tempels’ original intent, which they consider anticolonial.⁵ The most striking effort of Roothaan and Bello, however, lies in the comparison between the concept of vital force and the Yorùbá concept of *àṣẹ*, as expressed in *Ifá*, the Yorùbá divination and knowledge system. Drawing on an insightful interpretation of *àṣẹ*, Roothaan and Bello establish intercultural intersections between the two concepts and point to their current relevance in African philosophy.

Justin Sands’ paper examines Kwasi Wiredu’s conception of personhood, notably his argument that as a status, personhood is earned rather than granted by virtue of being born a human. In this respect, personhood is a quality whose characteristics must be recognized by one’s community as demonstrated by an individual within it. One way of acknowledging the originality of this perspective is to contrast it with Kant’s views on the person, which he conceives primarily as an abstract entity one must approach idealistically and only then practically. On Wiredu’s side, however, things are reversed, and the person is primarily a practical entity and only then an idealistic one. In short, in Wiredu’s enterprise, anthropology replaces metaphysics as the first philosophy, a position that entails several consequences in terms of conceptual decolonization,

especially concerning the dialectics of the universal and the particular as it relates to the dialectics between African and European traditions.

The last set of papers delves into ongoing debates within African philosophy. These debates include the interpretation of traditional philosophical systems, the exegesis of influential books, and the introduction of new methods to support the development of African philosophy as an established discipline.

Abidemi Israel Ogunyomi's paper explores the Yorùbá thought system from the perspective offered by the question of evil. Departing from E. O. Odùwólé's and Kazeem Fáyẹmí's interpretations of this issue, Ogunyomi proposes an existential approach according to which the philosophical problem of evil arises in Yorùbá thought with regard to the very existence of the Yorùbá person and the Yorùbá society, hence, his reference to existentialism. Ogunyomi's argument runs as follows. First, he presents some contentions and (mis)conceptions related to the problem of evil in Yorùbá thought, in particular regarding the nature and relationships of *Ibi* (evil) to *Ire* (good), the attributes of Olódùmarè, the Yorùbá God, and Kazeem Fáyẹmí's claim that the only relevant philosophical formulation of the problem of evil is logical. Second, he articulates, in a compelling way, his existentialist conception of evil in Yorùbá thought with examples (primarily proverbs, sayings, and *Ifá*) from the Yorùbá culture.

Adoulou N. Bitang's paper challenges the conventional agreement on Fabien Eboussi Boulaga's most famous philosophical essay. By delving into the relationship between this book and Marcien Towa's philosophical views and convictions, the paper sets the stage for a thought-provoking discussion that aims to clarify the critical extent of Eboussi Boulaga's book with regard to this central figure of the debate on African philosophy in the 1960s–1980s. Drawing on the preface to *Muntu in Crisis*, Bitang examines two case studies whose findings allow him to refute the claim that Eboussi Boulaga criticizes Marcien Towa in his book. However, evidence from the same preface suggests that contrary to popular belief, there is a clear filiation between Eboussi Boulaga and Towa, which the former even explicitly acknowledges.

In his paper, Jaco Louw explores the extent to which philosophical counseling can relate to African philosophy. He identifies two main issues the philosophical counseling discourse shows, namely method and disinterest in non-European philosophical traditions. On the first issue, Louw argues that contrary to the current debate which relates to the discussion of methods within this practice, philosophical counseling can be seen as a method in itself. On the second issue, Louw regrets that, in its current form, the philosophical counseling discourse is primarily informed by the Western philosophical tradition. He therefore makes the case that there is a need for African philosophy in it. Tsenay Serequeberhan's and Jonathan Chimakonam's approaches to African philosophy help Louw articulate his understanding of what such a discipline means and entails, and how it can inform philosophical counseling while benefiting from it at the same time.

In conclusion, the papers gathered in this special issue offer refreshing understandings and accounts of African philosophy, both in general and with regard to specific topics, issues, and debates within the discipline. I am confident, therefore, that the insights presented here will leave no one indifferent and will, I hope, inspire and invigorate the ongoing scholarly discussions within the field, thereby further advancing African philosophy and its study.

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Notes

- ¹ In the same vein, I have chosen to respect each author's preferences regarding English conventions as long as they remained consistent throughout their papers. As a result, the reader will notice that there is no uniformity in spelling and other language conventions from one paper to another in the volume, which is a conscious decision on my part, as I did not want to impose my own preferences on the contributors.
- ² These distinctions are usually sustained by "dishonest equations," such as "*Christianity=civilization, paganism=savagery*," which bear "abominable colonialist and racist consequences" toward "the Indians, the Yellow peoples, and the Negroes" (Césaire 33).
- ³ See Towa (10–22).
- ⁴ See for example Franz Crahay's seminal and influential essay setting forth the 'Conceptual Take-Off Conditions for a Bantu Philosophy' (Crahay, notably 63 ff).
- ⁵ The interested reader may wish to compare this article with Fabien Eboussi Boulaga's rereading of Tempels, who maintains that while Tempels and his fellow missionaries appear to disagree *prima facie* on the sources, foundations, and methods of their mission as connected to ethnography as an academic discipline, they fundamentally agree on some key points directly related to it, namely "the superiority of their race and its civilization" (Eboussi Boulaga 57. My translation). They also "unite in depreciating others, in the conviction that their tutelage is a necessity and a blessing" (57). From this, Eboussi Boulaga concludes that "Tempels adheres to the common colonial prejudice, with its attitudes and language. It is through it that he sees, hears, and judges" (57).

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Decolonization and African Philosophy: A Critical Synthesis

EVARISTUS EMEKA ISIFE

Abstract: Decolonization, broadly construed, has to do with the cultural, psychological, and economic freedom of indigenous people to achieve indigenous sovereignty. At the core of decolonization is true independence from an alien way of life and influence. By proscribing colonialism and the racism that accompanies it, decolonization assumes a reversal of those norms, such as respect, empathy, and dignity, which shaped the relationship of peoples and states. Applying the method of critical analysis, this paper interrogates decolonization and African philosophy on the basis of the freedom it bequeaths and its task of bringing about the desired development to the African continent.

Keywords: decolonization, colonialism, Africa, freedom, development

Introduction

Decolonization designates a specific world-historical moment, yet it also stands for a many-faceted process that played out in each region and country shaking off colonial rule. The term has been attested lexically since 1836 when some theoretical elaboration was found in the writings of the German émigré economist Moritz Julius Bonn in the inter-war period. It was used significantly from the mid-1950s onwards (Jansen and Osterhammel 1). Decolonization, as an ideology, started because of the need to end colonialism and to heal the harm it has caused. Colonialism ended for a variety of reasons. One of the most important causes of its dissolution was that it gradually lost its *raison d'être* in the eyes of a growing number of people both in the colonies and the metropolises. This transformation in the worldwide climate of opinion had already become apparent and legally binding in 1960 when the General Assembly of the United Nations, in its epoch-making Resolution 1514, declared that “all people have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right, they determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development” (Oelofsen 130).

So, decolonization sent shocking waves that went far beyond the dissolution of formal colonial rule. Thus, it has been argued that African philosophy ought to be instrumental in the project of decolonizing the African mind (136). Decolonization is the change colonized countries undergo when they become politically independent from former colonizers. Decolonization is not merely a matter of getting political independence. It entails changing or dissolving governmental and economic structures, institutions, and organizations. It is also about changing how former colonial subjects were encouraged to think and act, which are often still determined by former colonial powers due to the economic and cultural influence they wield.

To this end, black persons, following Fanon, have to liberate themselves from the arsenal of complexes that germinated in the colonial situation, overcoming the psychological effects of colonialism. On the flip side, and according to Oelofsen (140), African philosophy aims to restore health lost by the colonial heritage of violent oppression and exploitation by exploring truths articulated within the context of Africa, even though this may still be far from being realized. Again, African philosophy draws and creates concepts from the place of Africa and, hence,

can be an instrument in the decolonization of the African mind. This is possible, however, through providing an alternative framework for knowledge, which “de-centers” the assumed (Western) center of knowledge. This does not mean advocating for ethno-philosophy but for concepts that can be drawn from it so that African philosophy will advance from a philosophy of place to one with universal relevance. Such concepts include *Ubuntu*, *Igwebuike*, *Ibuanyidanda*¹ and others. African ethno-philosophers record and aim to recover the folk philosophy of specific African cultures. Though ethno-philosophy focuses on the peculiarities within the African context, it does not align with philosophy in place, as philosophy in place utilizes the particular as a starting point for critical engagement. Hence, African philosophy in place urges African philosophy to be current for it “to maintain both the Africanity and Philosophicality as its essential characteristics, for in them it receives its particularity and universality” (Osugwu 28).

This paper attempts to examine the normative structure of decolonization as a concept so that the proper emphasis can be placed on the knowledge and contribution of Africa to the intellectual landscape. It wishes to help Africans overcome the belief that they are inferior (Enaifoghe 63). Thus, understanding African philosophy as postcolonial philosophy-in-place² is crucial to the decolonizing project. The methodology is to start from the individual’s particular place not only geographically but also contextually, as Africa³ denotes more than a geographical location, and to recognize that this could affect one’s ideas, and so to focus on what the individual’s specific context can offer for understanding, creating, and investigating concepts.

Colonialism Explained

Colonialism is both a practice and a worldview. As a practice, it involves the domination of a society by settlers from a different society. As a worldview, colonialism is a truly global geographical, economic, and cultural doctrine rooted in the worldwide expansion of the West, even though it is not exclusive to a European/Western phenomenon. It is also known as European capitalism, which survived well after most colonial empires collapsed. Thus, colonialism has been described as the principle of imperial state craft and effective strategy of capitalist expansion that involved sustained appropriation of the resources of other societies, regions, of the world for the benefit of the colonizing society, backed by an elaborate ideological justificatory apparatus. (Borocz and Sarkar 1)

As a worldview, colonialism is a global geopolitical, economic, and cultural doctrine that involves the superimposition of the rule of an alien social order on another. As such, violence inheres in all its aspects. Colonialism can be seen further as a compound effect of three interconnected fields of domination, which are political-economic, social-institutional, and representational-symbolic systems. In this respect, colonialism involves the destruction of the social, legal, political, agrarian, proto-industrial, and other technological structures of the colonized society. It is very unlikely that the reason and motive behind colonialism was altruistic considerations. But as far as it is known, colonialism has political and ideological aspects. The political aspect has to do with the spreading of empires and state glory, while the ideological aspect has to do with capitalism and the expansion of economic frontiers. The striking contemporary poverty of some of the erstwhile colonial societies can be linked to the political and economic processes of colonial value transfer and devastation as upheld throughout the centuries of colonial rule. Colonialism also produced social forms in the colonies that were distinct from those in place in Europe, even though in both contexts, the drawing force was the rise and expansion of capitalism.

Understanding Decolonization

Frantz Fanon (28), among other thinkers, has insisted that decolonization entails the creation of “new men,” where the ‘thing’ which has been colonized becomes man during the

same process of decolonization. Decolonization has been described as the process that colonized countries pass through when they become politically independent from their former colonizers. However, decolonization is not merely a matter of political independence but also involves the dissolution of the colonial inherited structures of government and other institutions and how a former colonized country is economically organized. Furthermore, decolonization involves a conscious change or restructuring of how former colonial subjects were made to think and act due to colonialism or colonial education. In order to overcome the legacy of colonialism, it is also necessary to decolonize the mind of the formerly colonized (Oelofsen 130).

Hence, decolonization concerns the dissolution of inherited colonial structures, as seen in the political and social institutions of formerly colonized countries, and the restructuring of the minds of the formerly colonized people, who were made to think that they were inferior and an extension of the colonial personality. The colonialists ruled their hosts using the structures of colonies and protectorates. A colony is a region or government unit created by another country and generally ruled by another country. Decolonization, then, will mean the emergence of new nation-states or the process that will lead to the independence of former colonies. Decolonization can be pushed by the colonizing country (disentanglement) or achieved through the struggle for freedom of the colonies. Either way, it speaks of independence for the colonized as well as the sense of right action by the colonizing or imperial power.

Moreover, decolonization has two stages: political decolonization and ideological decolonization. Political decolonization occurred during the independence of formerly colonized countries. Political decolonization has four broad types: change of imperial masters, formal empire replaced by informal empire or neo-colonialism, self-government for white settlers, and formal end to empire followed by independent rule. Ideological decolonization has to do with the conscious dissolution of the inherited colonial structures and the change or restructuring of the mind of the formerly colonized, which was affected by colonial education. The two stages of decolonization are interwoven as both are related, and neither can stand on its own without the other. Political decolonization has not ended, as colonial masters interfere significantly in the political affairs of their former colonies. It is the task of African philosophy to ensure that ideological decolonization is successful in Africa. This will likewise bring about real political independence to the formerly colonized countries of Africa. Decolonization is a process whose endpoint is the freedom of the colonized.

All the undercurrent that led to the decolonization process can be attributed to the fact that humans cannot come to terms with what is unjust and unfair. Decolonization becomes a protest philosophy, implicitly or explicitly, and one that cannot be ignored in the whole gamut of the unfair treatment that European imperialists meted on the colonized.

For the purpose of this paper, the *locus* is to understand the concept of decolonization and its intricacies as it concerns the cultural and political life of the people of Africa and its interconnectedness with African philosophy. It is crucial also to scrutinize how far Africa has been able to make the most of this decolonization window in regaining her lost identity and place in the scheme of things.

African Philosophy

African philosophy as a discipline was non-existent before the 1920s as a corpus of courses taught in the university. The teaching of African philosophy in universities began in the 1970s. This was because of the colonial antics that tended to undermine and discredit everything associated with Africa. However, as Uduigwomen (3) avers:

The debate or controversy on whether or not there is an African philosophy is dead and buried. At best, it is a matter of mere historical interest...The subject 'African Philosophy' is presently being taught either as a self subsisting course or as part of comparative philosophy in many African

universities. A number of theses have been written on it by both undergraduate and postgraduate students. In addition, a good number of journal articles and textbooks have been or are being published on it.

African philosophy has gone beyond the question of its existence and nature into actual theorizing. The pioneering and enduring efforts of such African scholars as Bodunrin, Sodipo, Alexis Kagame, Wiredu, Orika, Hountondji, Okere, Omoregbe, Nkrumah, and so on cannot be ignored even though the focus of African philosophy has moved from mere apologetics to actual philosophizing on thematic issues that have universal relevance and applicability. This keeps African philosophy's mill constantly grinding with new and fresh perspectives springing up. So, Momoh (viii) is concerned about African philosophy as he maintains that the "...present state is such that the discipline suffers from about four ailments: stagnation, isolation, imitation and deception."

African philosophy can be described as a body of work systematically written by Africans or non-Africans alike on existential and ontological issues from the lived experience and cultural worldview of Africans, alongside the attendant logic of such engagement. A good example of African philosophizing can be captured thus: "[M]y system, appropriately dubbed *Consolation Philosophy*, is not an existentialist system *per se*, in spite of the solid reference to concrete human conditions... It should rather be seen as a work of African rationalism... I do not desire a system that turns out to be a mere logic-chopping exercise" (Agada xix).

African philosophy can be said to be in the same genre as Western philosophy, Eastern philosophy, and American philosophy. However, it must be noted that no philosophizing is done outside of a cultural context. It can also be argued that no philosophizing is presuppositionless. This is why Ijiomah (v) asserts that "...every part of philosophy is coloured by the root-paradigms of the culture in which the philosophy is domiciled...every explanation has a logical base." So, for Africans to be denied rationality by Western instruments of colonialism is a grave error and evil done to the African psyche, which demands some form of reparation and restitution.

The Corollary between Decolonization and African Philosophy

The paper's primary aim concerns how decolonization has the same *fait accompli* as African philosophy. It is essential, therefore, to note that the economic growth of any people after gaining independence from the colonialists depends more on how the people organize themselves and make the most from what the society indigenously provides. This is where decolonization becomes meaningful and positively impactful only to the degree to which the decolonized know what to do with their new found freedom, something that African philosophy readily provides. African philosophy is more than just a genre of philosophy; it is a decolonization tool or instrument that can assist in the desired development of Africa. This is so because this field of scholarship interrogates a wide array of subjects that are imperative to the development of Africa and its people.

African philosophy is focused on addressing the core needs of the African people from the point of view of research and scholarship. The primary focus of African philosophy is not being an apologetics but being able to reflect on the lived existential reality themes that will help Africa to become a great continent. Sensing that African philosophy as it is does not reflect this true calling, Wiredu (21) asserts that:

It is probably clear without further argument that the exorcising of the colonial mentality in African philosophy is going to involve conceptually critical studies of African traditional philosophies. I might mention that African philosophy consists of both a traditional and a modern component. It would have been unnecessary to make a point that, in the abstract sounds so trite, were it not for the fact that some people seem to equate African philosophy with traditional African philosophy.

It is, in any case, perhaps not so trite to insist that the imperative of decolonization applies to both phases of African Philosophy.

African philosophy covers every aspect of the African experience. It is a corpus geared towards the knowledge, wisdom, and understanding of Africans, on abstract and physical issues, however complex. This kind of activity involves a lot of pure thinking devoid of external influences, which decolonization also pursues. This is why African philosophy must be understood as:

Not so much an area or topic within Philosophy as it is a set of culturally original questions about the full range of philosophical issues. It deals with metaphysics, epistemology, axiology and methodology, as well as with the problems and opportunities of Intercultural philosophizing and does so in ways that cover the gamut of the analytic/continental divide in Western Philosophy (Janz 690).

Contemporary African philosophy has moved on from analyzing traditional issues to systemic logic building so that all seven or more trends of African philosophy, which include Ethno-Philosophy, Philosophic Sagacity, Nationalistic-Ideological Philosophy, Professional Philosophy, Hermeneutical Philosophy, Historical Philosophy, and Literary or Artistic Philosophy, are present in the perimeter of African philosophy which, today, has assumed the role of decolonizing and deconstructing issues with the prospect of advancing knowledge that will be beneficial to Africans. This is why this paper argues that decolonization has the same aim as African philosophy, namely the emancipation and freedom of Africa.

Moreover, contemporary African philosophy focuses on developing indigenous African logic, which aids in understanding African peoples and their worldviews. For Instance, Anthony Kanu and Jonathan Chimakonam have theories called *Igwebuike* and *Ezumezu*, respectively. Both authors strive to tell the story of an authentic African way of thinking and how this can aid the process of independent thinking of Africans as well as their survival.

Furthermore, challenges to African philosophy still abound, and Martin Asiegbu (1) iterates that they are “of two major kinds: one is deconstructive and the other reconstructive.” After a century of Western discourse about Africans, it is the task of the deconstructive challenge to explore and expose the limiting ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and ideologies of such an existing negative discourse that burdens the African psyche. Mainly repressive and subjugating of Africans, such ideas equally subserve the postcolonial, socioeconomic, political, and cultural institutions in African society. Consequently, decolonization and African philosophy cannot be discussed in isolation, especially as they both have the primary task of ensuring the liberation and emancipation of Africa from colonial vestiges.

Important Areas in Need of Decolonization in Contemporary Africa

African Philosophy of History

African philosophy of history is one of the foremost areas that need urgent decolonization. It has been argued that:

What is intended and expected is how to remove the imprint of colonial history and interpretation of history and effect a replacement of what African Philosophy of history would be. This replacement has to absorb the unfolding events and their corresponding feats prior to colonialism, the dogged exercises to overthrow colonialism and how such continued doggedness portends a better history and historicism for Africa (Isife 52).

The African past and present are as real to Africans as reality can be. Thus, the past provides the opportunity to unearth the African way of life in all facets so that one can make good use of it in the present to make plans or progress for the future. Africans must not always use Western categories to make sense of their situations. Africa has unique problems that may differ from the West's. This is why Africa needs to decolonize her own way of telling her story because

history is primarily concerned with telling a story. Hence, there must be a conscious attempt to bracket the history of Africa to properly delineate the African philosophy of history without Western influence.

African Political Philosophy

Although democracy is being embraced and accepted worldwide as the ideal form of government, Africa should look at its own uniqueness or its own peculiar challenges so as to either modify democracy if possible or jettison it for its own traditional system in order to address the many political problems confronting the continent. This is not to say that African traditional political systems were perfect before the West came to disrupt them with their system of governance. In fact, if one probes deeper, one will realize that there are many imbalances and flaws in it. Still, the point is that, just as with everything else in life, problems or challenges will always arise, which, of course, is not a setback but an opportunity for innovation and re-modification.

African political philosophy must reflect and capture the African experience, times, and culture. In fact, African political discourses should be texts and talks about African political ideas, contexts, and situations on how to govern African political societies, with these discourses both-ering on development, identity, unity, liberation, democracy, nation-building, and sovereignty.

African Philosophy of Science and Technology

It is a fact that pre-colonial Africa had knowledge of the workings and the laws of nature as well as proficiency in the art and science of fabrication of technological gadgets. So, to talk about decolonizing African philosophy of science and technology is, in a sense, trying to set the record straight that science and technology as is known today is not exclusively Western even though the West has done a lot more in this area with breakthroughs in different areas covering the air, land, and sea.

Traditional African metaphysics was the basis upon which traditional Africans confronted and made sense of the world. Divine forces reveal knowledge of medicine for specific ailments through dreams and visions, as well as how to control and predict the forces of nature. If these were not pragmatic, living in the traditional African time would have been challenging without modern vaccines or medicines. One may query that belief in the non-physical or non-material entities has no place in science. But many aspects of modern science also deal with non-physical issues, such as strings theory, black holes, quantum entanglement, etc. Western science has an aspect of rationalism where the internal logic of a system is known differently from the derivable laws of nature captured under the scientific method. Taiwo Afisi (59) has argued that the method of African science can be seen as a distinct method “that can be termed scientific.... there exist varieties of inquiry beyond what has been developed in the West, which can still be justifiably termed scientific. The social character of science, which makes it a part of social and cultural traditions, qualifiedly justifies ‘African science’ as a true science.” The body of knowledge in this field is vast and can be studied even in conventional universities, as it is done in South Africa, where witchcraft is studied as a bachelor’s degree program.

Until Africans, especially the thinking population, begin to see the need to develop traditional African science in a manner whereby it can begin to solve the problems of humanity, Africans would only be deceiving themselves that they are free from colonialism and its effect when they are not.

African Philosophy of Healthcare

The decolonization of African philosophy of healthcare can be achieved by institutionalizing traditional medicine in parallel with orthodox or Western medicine within the healthcare scheme. This is because Western medicine is costly and sometimes very difficult to access for

everyone. Healthcare is one of the fundamental needs of human beings for quality living and longevity. African ancestors knew the application of plant, animal, or mineral materials found in the hierarchy of forces, sometimes with incantations for healing purposes, which can be rationalized, explained, and investigated scientifically. It has to be noted that the use of *Salix alba*, the willow plant containing the salicylates for fever and pains, which led to the discovery of aspirin, is a form of traditional medicine.

This also shows that African ancestors were experimental in their search, which led to the discovery of the potency of these plants not in the very sense of Western experimentation but from the revelation of divine forces or through observation and experimentation, as the case may be. So, some scholars have described the traditional medical practitioner or traditional healer as a “person who is recognized by the community in which he lives as competent to provide health care by using vegetables, animals and mineral substances and other methods: serving as the nurse, pharmacist, physician, dentist, midwife, dispenser, etc.” (Elujoba et al. 48). The specialists include herbalists, bone setters, traditional psychiatrists, herb sellers, general practitioners, and so on. It is not a case of competition with Western medicine but a subtle quest to develop Africa’s indigenous episteme in the area of restoring health to Africans. Since this cannot be done without the knowledge of the workings of traditional Africa, there must be ways of developing, preserving, and teaching traditional African culture in healthcare as a curriculum for schools and a health policy for governmental implementation.

African Philosophy of Economic Development

In decolonizing African economic development, there is an imperative to revisit Africa’s distant past to strengthen the African spirit of communalism, as well as family-hood that regulates interpersonal relationships amongst Africans. Hence, whatever is done with regard to African economic emancipation without considering this vital aspect of African context and culture is incomplete. The economic dimension of traditional Africa holds a lot of promise that can be incorporated into the economic experience of contemporary Africa. For example, one fundamental question that can be asked with regard to policy formulation is what is in traditional African thinking that can be added to the economic analysis or projections for Africa’s emancipation. This question should always be asked because there are old ways of solving new problems. In traditional Africa, public utilities, such as roads, markets, halls, and squares, were built through community efforts in which every group member contributed their own quota for the collective good of all. This idea of African rulers coming into power and amassing public wealth is un-African. It is a Western residue of exploitation that is foreign to the traditional African system of economics. Wealth or economic prosperity in traditional Africa has a different connotation. It is not for the suppression of the people but for the service of other members of society. The principle of life forces also operates here with the understanding that every life force adds up to the collective force. What affects one affects the other, and the poverty of one is the poverty of the other. This ontological cum epistemological dimension of traditional African economic principles ought to be known by all and to be preserved or maintained.

African Philosophy of Infrastructural Development

In the same vein, Africa’s need for urgent infrastructural development demands decolonization from the West with regard to sourcing cheap local construction materials that can help save the continent’s wealth and avoid capital flight. This is because “Africa constitutes a substantial percentage of the growing urbanization without commensurate infrastructural development facilities to take care of the increasing population” (Msinjili et al. 48). The present economic downturn of many African countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, has caused the cost of building/construction materials to explode, making it difficult to actualize the expectations of

infrastructural provision. It can be understood if some of the materials for critical infrastructural development are imported to complement those that can be locally sourced, granted that the world is now globalized and Africa needs to sell its raw materials so she can get enough funds to invest in infrastructure.

Africa's economic growth and development are intrinsically linked to her infrastructural development, but it is the push-pull relationship with commodities that has become the driving force for infrastructural development in the African space. The benefits of sourcing local materials for Africa's infrastructural development and using local expertise are enormous. Africa's infrastructural development will also thrive if the concept of community and duty is imbibed as it is known in traditional Africa.

African Philosophy of Foreign Affairs

Finally, foreign policy in the contemporary world has taken a completely new shape. It has been stated that "the compulsory enrolment of all nation-states in the web of international relations gives rise to the imperative for them to formulate and implement policies which will maximize their interest within the fiercely competitive global system (Jibrin xxviii). Hence, African philosophy of foreign affairs must be carved out of the knowledge garnered over the years, especially from the long road to colonial freedom and independence. It must be such that it should benefit the continent and her people without equivocation. It should not be construed without a definite goal in mind, a case of just following the bandwagon. As the contemporary world holds various opportunities for the continent, Africa must be circumspective and intentional in her foreign policies and affairs. So, she should relate with other nations in the world without leaving out the ingredients of the African culture or identity, which, of course, must inform the background or foundation of any such relations.

Evaluation

The reality of neo-colonialism has put African countries in a situation where they are constantly at the receiving end of the always advancing, innovating production of (especially automotive, electronics and knowledge transfer) commodities exported from developed countries. The benefit that the globalizing economic neo-colonizers of today would derive from such socio-cultural petrification on the part of the neo-colonized is the assurance that, while the latter are committed to various outdated beliefs in an immobilized cultural tradition, the neo-colonizer would retain economic (and political) power over them (Olivier 5). It is easy to dwell on past cultural utopias, whether of imagined cultural purity, preceding imperialists' colonization, or successful resistance to colonial authorities, and deflects one's attention away from present neo-colonization, where one has to take root to overcome it.

Frantz Fanon took a full swipe at colonialism and its debilitating effect on the colonizers when he articulated his vision poignantly in relation to decolonization by stating that "it sets out to change the order of the world and is obviously a program of complete disorder"(27). Decolonization never takes place unnoticed, for it fundamentally influences individuals and modifies them. It transforms spectators crushed with the inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them. Fanon thus insists that decolonization brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new individuals, and with it, a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is then the veritable creation of new human beings. But this creation "owes nothing of its legitimacy to say supernatural power; the 'thing' which has been colonized becomes [human] during the same process by which it frees itself" (28).

Everything that will not be for the good of the African people or add value to them must be refused or rejected as a sign of enlightenment occasioned by an African philosophy or way of thinking. The present decade is governed by a society of contempt, where the power of money

triumphs and is erected as a true ideology inducing fear of the other, regardless of what form it takes. This ideology can be characterized by financial capital, corruption, the subjection of the impoverished, and a culture of fearing the other which leads to exclusion. This is why Fanon warned against “postcolonial nationalism,” where the newly empowered political elite duplicate the same structures of domination and confiscation of wealth. It is unfortunate that many African leaders fall into such traps.

During the struggles for liberation, the African leader (of whatever genre) awakened the people and promised them a forward, heroic, and unmitigated march. Such a leader, as illustrated by Fanon, uses every means to put them to sleep. The leader, because they refuse to break up the national bourgeoisie, asks the people to fall back into the past and become drunk on remembering the epoch that led up to independence. The leader, seen objectively, brings the people to a halt and persists in either expelling them from history or preventing them from taking root in it. Thus, to a larger extent, visionary leaders in a political setting can foster a decolonization process that benefits the people. But whether there are such visionary leaders in the African political and economic milieu is subject to debate owing to Africa’s slow developmental pace.

One would wonder if Africa has actually fared any better economically after gaining independence from the colonialists. Kevin Sylwester examines the growth rate of real GDP per capita with regard to decolonization in sub-Saharan Africa. Countries becoming independent grew slower than did countries not simultaneously undergoing this type of political change. However, there is no strong evidence of a cost to decolonization relative to remaining a colony. He concludes that “decolonizing countries are not found to grow slower than ones that remained colonies during the same period” (Sylwester 100). Decolonization thus appears as a positive phenomenon with varied advantages for several reasons, from freedom to political and economic development. Like African philosophy, decolonization provides new insights on how to view the world differently from seeing it from a particular external prism. Thus, to think in a decolonizing way is revolutionary with attendant benefits for a people or continent. Decolonization, therefore, is a catalyst or recipe for development if adequately understood and harnessed from the point of view of African Philosophy. It is on the strength of this that Fanon holds that decolonization entails the creation of “new people” that necessitates the turn towards the future instead of reclining to the past. Decolonization sums up as “the creation of a new human being, impervious to the hierarchization of humanity into a racial or cultural centre, and a number of subaltern rules and cultures of the colonized” (Olivier 3).

Kwasi Wiredu sees decolonization as divesting African philosophical thinking of all undue influences from her colonial past. The crucial word in his formulation is “undue,” as he agrees that rejecting everything of colonial ancestry would not be rational. To Wiredu, “that would be a madness having neither rhyme nor reason” (Wiredu 21). Yet, he admonished that one should be careful in adopting the theories of Western philosophy, particularly towards the categories of thought embedded therein because of historical colonial reasons, as it was not only a political imposition but also a cultural one. Wiredu suggests that African philosophers have to be doubly critical and use comparative models where necessary to project African thought clearly despite having been decolonized.

This being the case, decolonization does not enjoin anything like parochialism. Decolonization, then, has nothing to do with the attitude that implies that Africans should steer clear of those philosophical disciplines that have, at this particular point in human history, received their most remarkable development in the West. Suppose Africans do not enter these areas of philosophy and make their presence felt in them. In that case, they will perpetually remain outsiders to the project of understanding and clarifying modes of thought that have played a considerable part in the making of the modern world.

The vital task is to extract the benefits of decolonization and African philosophy as a recipe revolving around the conversation that promotes the African good. This is why there is a need for “Southern theory and a dramatic decolonization of the curriculum because the scholarship of teaching and learning in the South is a key site where contested postcolonial histories, geographies and epistemologies play out” (Manathunga 104). It has also been noted that Southern theories allow for critical thinking about the sense of multiple and contested histories, especially of colonialism, that are brought into supervision. In the case of supervision, there is a multi-layered operation of history present, which includes our own personal intellectual histories, the cultural histories of the many different cultural groups and sub-groups to which supervisors and students each belong, and the histories of the country in which the fieldwork or data and the supervision takes place.

Conclusion

Indeed, just anything can be decolonized if we understand the importance of conviviality and the principle of justice and harmony. African philosophy has continued to struggle to decolonize by seizing back the creative initiative of history through a real control of all the means of communal self-definition in time and space. Concerning the production of knowledge of Africa and its representation, the incompleteness of the decolonization struggle is evident in the fact that Africa today remains widely associated with chaos, illness, disorder, and a range of colonial stereotypes.

Decolonizing the African social and political institutions is the dual task of first placing African discourse at the center of the scholarship on Africa and, second, dislocating African humanity from the human-inhuman binary. The binary opposition of a primitive or traditional Africa to a modern or enlightened West continues to dominate academic discourses, contemporary journalistic accounts of Africa and its people, and the perspectives of international development and aid organizations. Hence, both African and non-African scholars have it as a challenge to establish the substantial and valid fact of African humanity, in all its diversity and form, and to enable the representation of Africa beyond its historical role as the foil to Western humanity (Mudimbe).

African voices have a right to be heard within intellectual discourses and a responsibility to represent themselves within the same discourses. Consequently, scholars must develop distinctively and explicitly African categories of intellectual inquiry. African scholars and scholars of Africa need to take advantage of academic and intellectual spaces opened by postmodern, postcolonial, and cultural studies theorists to rationalize African intellectual developments as explicit African reflections upon the specific experience of African historical agents.

Notes

- ¹ Ubuntu is a Nguni Bantu term that means humanity. It is best translated as “I am because you are. And because you are, I am.” It is a belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all of humanity. *Igwebuike* is a universal philosophy described in Igbo language by Igbo traditional philosophers. The philosophy means number is strength, number is power, or strength is unity. When human beings come together in solidarity, they achieve much more. The concept of *Ibuanyidanda* draws its inspiration from the teachings of traditional Igbo philosophers of the complementary system of thought. Hence, Innocent Asouzu (108) explains that: “One of the most common metaphors or imageries that the traditional Igbo uses to express the idea of complementarity is that of the collective effort needed by ants (*danda*) to lift heavy crumbs or loads (*ibu*) that would otherwise remain an insurmountable task.” For the Igbo philosophers of Nigerian extraction, the idea of complementarity is inferred from observing a species of ants called *danda*. These ants have the capacity to carry loads that appear bigger and heavier than them. What this implies is that they can surmount very difficult tasks where they are mutually dependent on each other in the complementation of their efforts.
- ² Philosophy in place is an intercultural way of thinking that is unique to a people and often capturing their lived experiences as they reflect upon the moral, aesthetic, and fundamental landscape of their environment.
- ³ Apart from being a geographical space, Africa is understood as a place replete with myths, legends, folklores, folktales, etc., that builds on the core beliefs of the people on matters of morality, knowledge, and the world.

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Tentative Epistemologies of Dividuation

MICHAELA OTT

Abstract: Thanks to increased postcolonial awareness, current philosophers such as myself seek to question the extent to which philosophy has contributed, epistemologically and ethically, to the subjugation, discrimination, and even enslavement of people from the global South. In this regard, I strive to listen to criticisms from non-European philosophers, anthropologists, and epistemologists. Additionally, contemporary philosophers propose to deconstruct some of the central philosophical concepts, for example, the *individual*, which they replace with the concept of *dividuum* or, like myself, *dividuation*. They intended to suggest a (non-un)dividedness and participation of the person in different epistemological fields. Interestingly, the concept of dividuation shares several similarities with African philosophical concepts such as Ubuntu and Ujamaa and the Antillean concept of des-individuation.

Keywords: individuality, epistemic imperialism, critical humanism, non-European philosophies, dividuation

Introduction

Thanks to increased postcolonial awareness, European philosophies of arts and aesthetics now recognize themselves as having been conditioned by specific historical anthropologies of the person, by academic elaborations of human individuality, and by some core assumptions such as Hegel's conviction of the inevitability of individual self-appropriation or Kant's thesis of everyone's spontaneous aesthetic judgment of taste, regarding the reception of works of art considered as isolated entities.

One of the main goals of the postcolonial¹ critique is initiating an endeavour to incorporate non-European perspectives. The intent here is not only to enrich the range of philosophical ideas and understandings but to question the inherent violence in historical European philosophical concepts and, ultimately, to replace them with modified ones in light of different views and understandings. The first step is to seek recognition of the fact that the academic discipline of philosophy of aesthetics was developed during the 18th-Century European Enlightenment as a result of specific cultural parameters. These included the establishment of public universities and of philosophy as an academic discipline in which assumptions regarding the autonomy of the human person and its distributable capacities were taught, for example, by Immanuel Kant. The second step of the postcolonial critique is to uncover prejudicial differentiations between persons of different cultures, as will be explained along with some of Kant's philosophical statements. Strangely enough, his *Critique of Pure Reason* was accompanied in the same year by theories of race in which he established a hierarchy of skin colours, placing white and red at the top and black and yellow at the bottom. My general argument, therefore, is that certain conceptions should be eliminated and replaced by more encompassing ones, developed either by European philosophers reflecting on their philosophical heritage, anthropologists analysing the implicit/explicit understanding of 'persons' and 'communities' in the Global South, or philosophers from the Global South who criticise or deconstruct the European epistemological tradition.

This article is an attempt to offer alternative understandings of “the person”, as expressed in concepts such as “des-individuation” by Martinican philosopher Edouard Glissant, in the concepts of “Ubuntu” as discussed by South-African philosopher Leonhard Praeg or “Ujamaa”, which was coined by Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere in the 1960s. All these concepts emphasise the community-related and multicultural existence of contemporary human persons.

My critique of the modern understanding of the “individual” is based on some European philosophies, such as Spinoza’s or the French sociological tradition, as will be explained later. The novel concept of dividuation which I propose refers to similar concepts, such as “the dividual”, coined by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze for aesthetic enunciations and adapted by anthropologists Marshall Sahlins, Marilyn Strathern, and Viveiros de Castro. By so doing, they refer to different communities originating in the Global South and to the self-understanding of their members related to huge families and communities. My understanding of the term “dividuation” aims to highlight the “being-part-of” and “being entangled” aspects in epistemologically differentiated areas of research for the sake of a more encompassing conception of human existences in the contemporary world.

1. Postcolonial reactions to epistemic imperialism

Due to the generally increased awareness of the colonial past and the history of enslavement, it comes as no surprise that Western philosophical parameters and modes of self-understanding are now being questioned and criticized by theorists from the Global South.

Using the terms “cognitive empire” or “epistemic imperialism”, Zimbabwean epistemologist Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (*Epistemic freedom in Africa*) calls for a “decolonization of the mind” and “the inclusion of the contribution of Others” into epistemology. Argentinean anthropologist Walter D. Mignolo underlines the opportunity for “unlearning” offered by “postcolonial” criticism:

The postcolonial (...) is not just a new field of study or a gold mine for extracting new riches but the condition of possibility for constructing new loci of enunciation as well as for reflecting that academic knowledge and understanding should be complemented with ‘learning from’ those who are living in and thinking from colonial and postcolonial legacies (...). Otherwise, we run the risk of promoting mimicry, exportation of theories, and internal (cultural) colonialism rather than promoting new forms of cultural critique and intellectual and political emancipations — of making colonial and postcolonial studies a field of study instead of a liminal and critical locus of enunciation (Mignolo 5).

Both theorists call for a fundamental epistemic reorientation and a commitment to a discussion of how we understand human persons and their artistic productions that are not Western in their orientation. My proposal to similarly “decolonize” the philosophy of aesthetics does not only refer to the West-European colonization in the late 19th century and the “Scramble for Africa”. It also encompasses the philosophical self-understanding of the Global North and its epistemic foundations.

When it comes to Kant’s philosophical assessment in his *Critique of Judgment*, it becomes obvious that his philosophy of aesthetics does not only rest on normative assumptions relating to time-specific graphical beauty and technical mastery based on the historical development of aesthetic proportions in Western Europe and on established bourgeois ideas of their optimal presentation and reception forms. The fact that artworks in Europe are usually separated from ordinary life and displayed in sacred or secular protected areas where they can assert a spiritual character and an intangible autonomy is part of Kant’s compartmentalization of zones of rationality and sensitivity, of an artwork’s contemplation by detached persons and its resultant commodification. Nigerian anthropologist Abiodun Akande (‘Art and life at Ìsàlẹ̀-Òyọ̀ community’) and Senegalese philosopher Babacar Mbaye Diop (‘La question de la restitution

du patrimoine africain...') criticized this aesthetic understanding and refuted the commodification of African art objects in European museums.

It is no surprise that the central concept of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, namely the *sensus communis* or "common sense", has become open to criticism today. After all, his critique is based upon the assumption of a self-evident experience of beauty that excludes the possibility of other ways of perceiving and judging aesthetic parameters. Kant's judgment reveals itself to be a racial and racist statement since it assumes that certain people of non-European descent, such as Iroquois people, are incapable of making judgments of taste. This enunciation refers to his earlier writing *Von den verschiedenen Rassen der Menschen* ('Of the different human races') of 1775, in which he established a hierarchy of races, placing white and red men above black and olive-yellow persons.

For these reasons, French philosopher Gilles Deleuze criticizes the Kantian model for being a mode of simple "recognition" rather than a challenge to cognition, relating human capacities to geometrical and agrarian laws of distribution, and other such stereotyping assumptions of sensitive experience:

Recognition makes a claim for a subjective principle of the working together of capacities for 'everyone', a community spirit as *concordia facultatum*; and, at the same time, the identity form of the object makes a claim to be (...) a ground of the unity of a thinking subject (Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* 174. Translated by Alison Kirkland).

Nigerian philosopher Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, for his part, criticizes Kant because his ethics, based on the "moral law within" (within a human being), is unconsciously related to Newtonian physics and its deterministic laws of nature. While striving to determine "a specifically human, inner *nature*" (Eze, 'The Color of Reason' 108. Original emphasis), Kant nevertheless arrives at the aforementioned hierarchical assessment of races according to skin colour. As one can argue, aesthetic judgment *à la* Kant does not reflect upon itself and its prejudices but transitions into not wanting to know.

In rereading the most renowned German philosopher, Emmanuel Eze discovers that Hegel did more than just accuse the African person of having no historical understanding. He even declared colonialism "a benefit to Africa because Europe inseminated it with reason, ethic, culture and mores, and thereby historicized it" (Eze, 'Introduction' 8–9). "Hegel does not raise any ethical questions or moral considerations because (...) he declared the African subhuman. It is for good reasons then that 'the critique of Eurocentrism' has become a significant, if 'negative' moment in the practice of African philosophy" (10). Eze questions, once again, "the relationship between the European claim to universality (...) and the fact that the 'ideals' of European modernity have been separated, up to now, from their associated historical implementation" (12). He analyses Africa's experience of the 'Age of Europe'

as the *cost* of Occidental modernity. This idea of the 'cost' (...) has to be understood literally, as that which had to be sacrificed in order to purchase, or pursue, European modernity's 'order'. (...) By dialectically negating Africa, Europe was able to posit and represent itself and its contingent history as the (...) ideal humanity (13).

By this token, the term 'cost' refers to the sacrifice of differing African knowledge and convictions and the victory of a complacent Western attitude to the detriment of the whole earth in the long run. Since "Europeans originally introduced the notion of a *difference in kind* between themselves and Africans as a way of justifying unspeakable exploitation and denigration of Africans" (13. Eze's emphasis), the question of the *Anthropos* must today be reconnected with new epistemological insights and ethical parameters.

Expanding on this, Eze ('The Color of Reason' 103–140) and others underline the fact that liberal European philosophers, from John Locke to Hegel, connect their conceptions of the hu-

man individual with bourgeois culture and legitimize the right to vote through land ownership. Especially in his late *Philosophy of Law*, Hegel argues that the assumption of a free man per se is one-sided since freedom must always be appropriated and mediated. A free spirit would be one who gains a free existence thanks to “a process of self-appropriation” (§57). A person, therefore, is constituted by the “absolute right of appropriation of all things” (§44). This statement is followed by the strange remark that “nothing is end in itself—no living being; not blood, Jews—not India, Egypt”. Since the human will can extend to and appropriate all things, it may also appropriate human beings. Therefore, the bourgeois society is “driven” to colonialism in order to provide for its labour and industry requirements. Consequently, it appears that the moral law associated with the domain of freedom is restricted to the ratio of “possessive individualism”, to echo a criticism by C. B. Macpherson (*The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*).

I call these philosophical reassessments of German philosophers epistemic imperialism since they provide the philosophical basis and justification for political imperialism, racism and colonialism. Along with political oppressors, they despise epistemic contributions to the construction of knowledge from people they do not even know but want to “appropriate”. The philosophers are not interested in getting to know the categories by which people they consider inferior understand themselves, forcing them to think of themselves in foreign and humiliating terms. Epistemic imperialism is therefore the continuation of political imperialism in the realm of knowledge. Postcolonial philosophers oppose epistemic imperialism and thus radicalise their critique.

2. Problematizing the individual

Since the philosophy of Enlightenment is based on the assumption that the human – mainly male – agents have to understand themselves as autonomous and necessarily appropriating individuals, my philosophical research is directed at the de-construction of the term ‘individual’ as the figure responsible for historical and contemporary acts of imperialistic appropriation, of cultural discrimination, and, last but not least, planetary destruction. I therefore refer to different philosophers who already criticised this notion as misleading while not abandoning the term “individual”.

Historically, the concept of the individual reveals the attempt to define a basic and undivided unit within an early physical worldview. Greek atomists formulated the concept of *atomon* as the smallest undivided entity in the universe. The Latin term *individuum* is the translation of this Greek notion made by Cicero in the first century of the current era. The concept initiated a 2000-year history of philosophical interpretation of the individual as a substantial and independent entity. However, it is interesting, and quite contrary to our expectations, that throughout the history of philosophy, the “individual” has nevertheless – and for good reasons – been expounded in terms of inner multiplicity and dividedness. For example, Spinoza explains

that the human body requires for its preservation many other bodies by which it is continually regenerated. Its solid, fluid, and gaseous (segment) individuals appear to be affected by other bodies and to affect other bodies. Affection is useful to man; the more useful, the more capable it renders the body of being affected in many ways and so affecting other bodies (Spinoza, *Postulata* 4, 139).

Spinoza’s ethic thus amounts to the call to increase (non-in)dividuation thanks to multidirectional (self)affections – and thereby proposes a model diametrically opposed to the one propagated by liberal philosophers such as John Locke. In his *Two Treatises of Government*, John Locke, writing in 1690, formulated the first liberal-democratic theory of the state, in which political power concerns itself exclusively with the preservation of every citizen’s property. This fatal connection of bourgeois rights with land ownership was reinforced by Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*, where he explicitly endorses this theory, declaring the economic striving of the individual to be a beneficial virtue because it generates prosperity for the whole nation.

In their anti-idealistic text, *Die Deutsche Ideologie*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels emphasise that they are taking “real individuals” as their starting point. They assert that, under the rule of exchange value, “human individuation is transformed into des-individuation, subsumed to relations independent of them”. They stress that consciousness is a “social product” (Marx and Engels 44), at best comprehending the necessity of associating with other individuals. Interestingly, they already point at the commodification of individual forces becoming either private property or being sold to capitalist owners within industrial production. Since the workers lose their capacities under these desalienating conditions and become “abstract” individuals (87), they should set aside their self-interest and connect with others to form a “totality” of abilities in order to become “complete individuals” (88) without class.

Because it oscillates between an analysis of the single person and social facts, 19th-century French sociology often underlines the inconsistency of the ‘individual’ and therefore proposes more encompassing terms. Gabriel Tarde, for example, sees individuals as embedded in “trans-individual” physical and psychic values. Because he understands human beings as the cross-roads of non-individual affects and ideas, he characterises them as all-encompassing and generic values, as “a universal medium, a universe in itself” (Tarde 57). His idea of an initially differentiated psychological state anticipates Freud’s, Simondon’s and Deleuze’s assumptions concerning the unconscious, pre-individual, dividual, and socially embedded differentiability of the single person, which is realised according to different and often divergent cultural actualisations.

Actual critiques of the concept of the individual are mainly articulated by postcolonial thinkers such as Stuart Hall, who claims that the Western concept does not correspond to the hybrid identities of vast parts of the world’s population, who are forced to migrate and adapt to foreign cultures and to become dis-individuated in the quest for survival. In his turn, philosopher Jacques Nanema from Burkina Faso (see Nanema, ‘L’éducation selon Mounier’) criticises African disciples of the cult of the European conception of the individual since, in following it, they leave behind all the constraints of solidarity. Cameroonian economist Francis B. Nyamnjoh (29) maintains that pieces of research in Cameroun and Botswana “suggest that Africans are not only interested in rights and freedoms as individuals, but also in rights and recognition as communal and cultural solidarities”.

The Western understanding of the individual, misleadingly considered the general constitution of the person, is rejected as a new form of colonisation by Cameroonian philosopher Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, who also criticises this understanding of human identity:

Individualism – not just methodologically, but also ideologically and supposedly ontologically – is the vaunted fixed point of all social, political, moral, and religious sciences. It is postulate, method, object, and result, all in one. From this point, the individual is (...) a normative subject of institutions, moral, independent, autonomous and (significantly) non-social being. Thus, one is dealing with an ideal notion, a concept that reproduces the self-definition of a detached, boundary-drawing identity that understands itself, in relation to scientific determination of reality, as producer and product. (...) Anything founded upon this out-of-proportion or ‘hyper-natural’ individual refutes itself and becomes its opposite (Eboussi Boulaga 201. Translated by Alison Kirkland).

Eboussi Boulaga goes on to say that, because the individual is “nothing”, the individual inevitably competes with others to regard itself as valued, “thus abandoning the most individual thing about itself to subjugate itself to the inescapable necessity of economic growth and the accumulation of power, outside of which no well-being can be found” (208). He points to the actual connectedness of the (empty) person to the capitalist economy.

Therefore, a different understanding of the person is required, which does not only refer to its possible economic valorisation but to its important position within various epistemic fields. The person has to be portrayed as a constituted and constituting entity placed within different epistemological fields and between different responsibilities, having to decide on their forms of participation and, by so doing, necessarily divduating themselves.

In this sense, South African philosopher Leonhard Praeg highlights that some African philosophers criticise the assumption of autonomous individuals. It is revealed to be a specific ethnophilosophical – better described as Eurocentric – self-understanding that does not correspond to other conceptions, such as Ubuntu, which theorizes different relations between persons and society. He translates Ubuntu as “We are interdependent” or “I am because we are” (Praeg 9), which does not define whom precisely this “we” comprises. He also points out the important fact that the Western discourse does not problematise the tension between the juridical concept of the person and the philosophical assumptions of human subjectivation as a processual entity co-constituted by other entities. The terms ‘individual’ or ‘undivided’ cannot represent this tension and are therefore inadequate. He calls for a return to a “critical humanism” (10) as a “glocal phenomenon” (11) that underlines the entanglement of local and global imaginaries.

Since critical humanism does not aim to improve or better exploit capacities and knowledge, the human should be conceived of as a “secondary concept” (12) that does not strive for relations of domination and does not concede the ascription of humanity to only specific persons. Since Africans are populations injured by the slave trade, colonialism, and ongoing capitalist exploitation, it would be indispensable to recognise and treat them as persons of equal grade by referring, for example, to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. “We do not struggle to get Ubuntu recognized; the struggle for recognition also determines how we come to think about Ubuntu. (...) we speak of it *because we need to make a point* about being black in a white world and African in a Western-dominated world” (14. Original emphasis). Praeg recognises that the “shared humanity” (18) he wishes for is untimely in an era that is all about fights for material resources and global participation and attention. Therefore, human practices should also be evaluated in terms of their effects on sustainability: “I take this to mean that there is no humanism, but only the sustained praxis of humanising” (20). This new understanding ought to assist us in figuring out a politics of the future and the common, where the question of belonging would be decisive: “*to be a person and (...) to belong to a community*” (35. Original emphasis). The task of this critical humanism would be to analyse the different contemporaneities in their multidirectional (non)participations – and not only in communities – and to repair deficient “belongings”. The single persons would have to recognise themselves as co-constituted by different others and accept this situation in its contextual conditionality in order to counter-act, enlarge, and modify it.

3. The counter-concept of dividuation

Today, further insights into single persons’ voluntary and involuntary participation in biotic masses and ecological ensembles in world societies and technological practices have created a need to redefine human subjectivations beyond the political realm. Current insights underline that human beings have always existed in relationships of interpenetration – with languages, images, technologies, other organisms, and social structures – that question all ideas of indivisibility in biological, social, cultural, and artistic realms alike. We recognise that our self-identity as undivided entities expresses a misleading negation of necessary, life-constituting participation, and we thus find ourselves faced with the task of considering, affirming, and moderating our possibly contradictory participations. We learn to recognise that the idea of undividedness – or subdividedness – depends on the choice and scale of our observation modes. Contrary to the term ‘individual’, the concept of dividuation is intended to focus on the person’s processual and self-reflective dividuation both through voluntary participation and involuntary subdivisions.

Today, for many reasons, among others, the technologically, economically and politically induced interferences of cultures in the globalised world, a critique and replacement of the Western concept of the individual seems inevitable. It must be replaced by a term that does not indicate separation, privilege, lack of inclusion or epistemological dualism but instead indicates

mobile relationships, forms of participation or even mutual constitutions of persons, cultures, societies, artworks, ecological assemblages, and so forth.

The terms 'dividual' or 'dividuation' intend to bring to the fore insights into the relatedness of existences with bio- and socio(techno)logical and with cultural, ecological, or aesthetic entities. The new perspective raises awareness of economic and digitalised capture, highlights ecological interdependencies, and fosters increased awareness of all sorts of voluntary and involuntary modes of participation, their possible tensions and contradictoriness and the need to decide on their quantity and quality.

The term 'dividual' is used by Gilles Deleuze in several texts with different affective values. In *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, published in 1986, Deleuze outlines a positive understanding of the dividual. Referring to films, he states that the temporal mobility of audiovisual framings permanently modifies the captured aesthetic 'ensemble', which, therefore, cannot be identified as an individual expression. He reads the time-dependent filmic – and musical – articulations as transitions between varying aesthetic combinations, not "divisible or indivisible, but dividual" (Deleuze, *Cinema 1* 14).

In his late writing on 'Postscript on the Societies of Control', Deleuze assigns a historical date to this becoming-dividual, equating its emergence with the transition from analogue to digital technology, from the disciplinary system to the control system of a capital-occasioned continuum of inseparable modulations. As he writes, the society of control imposes unending self-modellings of single persons "in a state of constant metastability" ('Postscript' 6). Therefore, he speaks of new subjectivation modes and new sociological distinctions: "We're no longer dealing with a duality of mass and individual. Individuals become 'dividuals' and masses become samples, data, markets, or 'banks'" (6. Original emphasis). The person appears as a computable information potential, whose future development is quantitatively predicted and whose financial profitability is estimated.

As today's perspective even of natural sciences teaches us, the contemporary becoming-world needs to be understood as an expanded principle of relativity that no longer corresponds to atomist physics. This new principle constrains us to adopt perspectives informed by various lenses and to train them on multi-scale levels. Advancing into the realm of the infinitely small, microscopic observation reveals that living microorganisms far below our perception threshold contribute to our psycho-physical constitution. The new biotechnologies demonstrate that we share a large portion of our genetic dispositions with non-human others as viruses and bacteria are co-responsible for the temporal unfolding of the human genome.

On the macroscopic level, the technological promise of increased information prompts us to insert ourselves into mediatised forms of social existence. We vitalise ourselves by means of imaginary and aesthetic participation in mediated activities in distant parts of the world and by communicating via social media with enormous quantities of persons unknown to us.

Recently, we have become aware of how technological devices are one of the things that condition us and help to subjectivate us. The technological apparatus coalesces with our neuronal structure and determines how we manage our time and affects. In the interest of capitalisable bio-politics, a single address is registered, personal capacities are quantified and financialised, and the person is voluntarily and involuntarily assigned to digital masses and forms of pre-emption. That which was once characterised as individual today appears to be multiply subdivided – partaking, both passively and actively, on different levels. Given this, how can we still think of ourselves as autonomous individuals? Participation reveals itself to be a highly precarious value, one that can mean an increased transfer of knowledge and affective alliances. It can also mean harsh separations, involuntary appropriations, and the undesired presence of others in 'our' place.

Several anthropologists and ethnologists share the conviction that cultures originating in the global South cannot be analysed within the Western conceptual framework of family, society, or the individual. Marilyn Strathern (13) together with Marshall Sahlins (*What Kinship Is–And is Not*), Viveiros de Castro (*Die Unbeständigkeit der wilden Seele*) and Abiodun Akande ('Art and life at Isàlè-Òyó community'), all use the term "dividual" to characterise not only gift economies but also general non-dualistic relationships between persons and their extended families in specific societies within the Global South. Others point to our increasing involvement in digital technologies, which force us to recognise that there is no longer an unambiguous boundary between the single person and their chat group or social medium.

Antillean philosopher Edouard Glissant (211) has already argued in the 1990s for an aesthetic "des-individualisation" and for the necessary abolishing of unified cultural understandings. Composite culture does not mean dilution or dispersion of aesthetic signs but instead means "their affirmed and not imposed partition" (211).

Very much like the concept of dividuation, Glissant's concept does not suggest division and loss of coherence. Instead, it conveys the conviction that persons and cultural products should des-individualise canonised forms by exposing their inherent and unnoticed multiplicity and entanglement with others of all sorts by subverting their universalised norm and by nevertheless synthesising their heterogeneity into a complex particular expression.

In my understanding, monocultural assignments should be replaced by ways of thinking and enacting art that are closer to Glissant's *Poétique de la relation*. Thanks to his Caribbean background, Glissant insists on the necessity of understanding artistic practices as necessarily "relational" or "composite-cultural" statements. They should reflect and connect with their historically inflicted legacies in terms of indigenous, Black, and colonially imposed expressions and should build up complex subterranean networks similar to the Caribbean archipelago. By doing this, they should provide an aesthetic model of relationality and pluriversality for the whole-world – le "Tout-Monde" – exposing their conflictual cultural layers, performing their political tensions and accentuating their aesthetic heterogeneity.

In the domain of art, art curators and theorists Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu, writing in 2009, also highlight cross-cultural orientations in the art practices of the Global South and a critical decentralization of the artmaking and art-exhibiting processes. In his introduction to *Contemporary African Art since 1980*, Enwezor (11) accentuates the diversity of African artistic practices, calling them "a series of shifting grounds composed of fragments, of composite identities, and micro-narratives". Primarily due to the digital communication of artistic brands and their hype in art biennials worldwide, no single work of art could any longer be considered a totally independent creation. In particular, non-Western art practices, situated somewhere between local traditions and global standards, would be constrained to bring about hybrid manifestations and to incorporate the "destiny" of contemporary art in processes of acculturation and deculturation: "Consequently, what emerges as contemporary is an art of the supplement and citation, set between different archives, between and among traditions, set in its own invented traditions: colonial and postcolonial, local and global, regional and transnational, diasporic and cosmopolitan spaces" (26).

Enwezor emphasizes the circulations in which African artistic practices are involved, within Africa as well as on the global stage. Together with Congolese philosopher V. Y. Mudimbe, he seeks to encapsulate this specific tension in the concept of "reprendre" (15), which designates the simultaneous appropriation of African and Western traditions, the referencing of (post)colonial social contexts and the resulting formal amalgamation by African art practices. The term "reprendre" thus calls for potentiated (des-in)dividuated aesthetic processes.

Today, calls for "dis-othering as a method" are being made to counter this threat of cultural-epistemic division and fixation. Philosopher Paulin Hountondji from Benin even asks us to

deconstruct the “myth of Africanity” and to abandon the program of Negritude and all other ethnocentric and separatist ways of conceiving identity: “It was necessary to begin by demythifying the concept of Africanity (...) *to rid it of all its ethical, religious, philosophical, political connotations*” (Hountondji 52. Original emphasis. Translated by Alison Kirkland).

Taking this further, I intend to emphasise that the processual term “dividuation”, while highlighting our multidirectional entanglements, does more than merely help us to bring to the fore insights into our inevitably shared planetary existence; it also reveals ambiguities or even involuntary captures of our capacities and affects. To achieve a more adequate recording of our entanglements with all the plural, often unknown agents and their intersections, it would appear indispensable to reveal their character of participation-occasioned dividuation that we will have to acknowledge and counter-act.

Conclusion

The valorisation of the ever-specific ‘dividual’ is also associated with the sociopolitical endeavour to transform our cultural and historical dividuatedness into inclusive participation care on all sorts of levels. This suggests that European, African, and other potentials should be put together in ‘condividual’ ensembles that combat capitalised appropriations and eco(techno)logical over-exploitation. Despite the associated fear of difference loss, one can still assert that every dividuation is different from every other owing to its peculiar participation mode and the way it represents a particular cohesion – which is also true for the cultural sphere.

Dividuation, to stress this once again, does not mean division or uniformisation. On the contrary, when persons become aware of their multidirectional participations, they recognise themselves as particular forms of participations whose coherence must be managed repeatedly. It remains desirable to accentuate composite cultural differences and to note from which perspective, with what framing, and according to which evaluation a given cultural statement can be recognised as specifically dividual and thus different.

More than any individual, persons who understand themselves as *dividuated* must decide on their particular shape, form, and quantity of participation while partially losing control over their manifold interferences with others. But precisely for this reason, there are no two identical human dividuums. Recognising oneself as a processual entity of dividuation is an immense task that becomes less frightening as we increasingly recognise it as a creative work. After all, dividual consciousness ultimately demands that we understand lateral ties as an opportunity for a becoming-world through affirmed ‘condividuums’ with others of different epistemological fields.

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Notes

¹ The term “(post)colonial” does not mean that colonialism is over, but that it continues in a different form without being named as such.

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African Philosophy and the Creative Arts in Africa: What should they Mean to each Other and Why?

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Abstract: One of the underemphasised aspects of African Philosophy is how creative arts in Africa should be brought to bear in the effort to advance this tradition of philosophy. My aim in this work is to address this concern. I do this by exploring the basis for a synergy between African philosophy and artistic creativity in Africa. I discuss whether there is any relationship between the two and whether both can re-enforce each other. To do this, I (A) first clarify the ideas of philosophy and art implied and applied in this work and (B) apply this to address four questions, namely, (B1) Can wisdom be loved beyond pen and paper? (B2). How philosophical can or should creative arts be? (B3) How creative can or should African philosophy be? (B4). How philosophically African can creative arts be? I draw my claim from the above questions to argue that African philosophy can promote its course by heavily expanding philosophical wisdom through creative art and exploiting the art of wisdom in Africa, which is hugely embedded in creative art.

Keywords: African philosophy, creativity, creative arts, synergy, wisdom

Introduction

A robust engagement of philosophy and creative art has been lacking in African philosophy. Primary literature that has mapped out different schools of thought and canons of discourse in African philosophy has often neglected the need to engage and involve creative art more seriously in formulating and producing knowledge that should fall under the discipline of African philosophy. This state of African philosophy is quite ironic given that art is a significant ethics of the African world where life is probably more celebrated than interrogated. A glance at the literature that has mapped out different schools of thought in African philosophy almost from its inception as an academic discipline includes Bodunrin ('The question of African philosophy'), Wright (*African Philosophy*), Oruka ('The fundamental principles in the question of African Philosophy'; Oruka ('Four trends in current African philosophy'), Wamba-diaWamba ('La philosophie en Afrique ou les défis de l'Africain philosophe'), Hountondji (*African Philosophy: Myth and reality*), etc. All this literature would validate this claim. They identify ways of doing African philosophy that exclude creative art. Creative art broadly means all forms of creativity that include or go beyond literary creativity – pottery, sculpture, paintings, photography, etc. Although lately the artist school of African philosophy has been added to the extant schools of thought in the discipline, it has not achieved the robust literature that other schools of thought, such as ethno-philosophy, critical current of thought, or even philosophical sagacity have achieved.

But what distinct role can be assigned to creative art in advancing the critical discourse on African philosophy and why? In this work, I intend to answer this question and advance this

aspect of philosophical research by providing literature on the critical engagement of African philosophy and creative art. My purpose is to uncover, recover and assist the readers to discover how and why creative art should find a more urgent place in the project of African philosophy. To do this, I (A) first clarify the ideas of philosophy and art implied and applied in this work and (B) apply this to address four questions, namely, (B1) Can wisdom be loved beyond pen and paper? (B2). How philosophical can or should creative arts be? (B3) How creative can or should African philosophy be? (B4) How philosophically African can creative arts be? I therefore draw from the above questions and the answers I shall provide to illustrate how African arts reflect these roles and how African philosophy can promote its course by exploiting the art of wisdom in Africa through creative arts. By addressing these questions, I will show how and why African philosophy and the creative arts can or should exploit their potential to serve the interests of each other and expand the frontiers of knowledge and wisdom.

The idea of philosophy and the idea of creative arts

Philosophy has had what can be called a coordinating definition as the *love of wisdom*, which arises through its Greek root words *philos* (love) and *sophia* (wisdom). It is from this that all other definitions or conceptions of philosophy have taken their root. Some views drawn from at least two philosophers, Kwasi Wiredu and Martin Heidegger, can help substantiate this claim.

For Wiredu, philosophy provides the intellectual foundation and basis for meaning. This function and nature of philosophy are so crucial that “if man shall not live by bread alone but by word of God”, as Jesus Christ submitted, “even less shall he live without a philosophy: for how, otherwise, shall he attain the very conception of God? How shall he attain a conception of value – of what to live for?” (cited in Oladipo 28). Similarly, for Heidegger, philosophy defines and directs the collective wisdom of a people by providing the best grounds and terms for self-concept. Heidegger (*Basic Writings* 130) thus claimed:

Philosophy is that thinking that breaks the paths and opens the perspectives of the knowledge that sets the norms and hierarchies of the knowledge in which and by which a people fulfil themselves historically and culturally, the knowledge that kindles and necessitates all inquiries and thereby threatens all value.

What can be read from these philosophers is that philosophy stands at the root of whatever claims to be and overhauls the human mind, either of the individual or the social group. It stands as the basis of any claims to reality and sustains such claims. Philosophy basically searches for what has not been heard, known, or seen or what has been heard, known, or seen rightly or wrongly and accounts for why this is the case. For this reason, it applies the method of criticism and logical evaluation of beliefs and assumptions. But while philosophy applies logic, logic does not summarise philosophy precisely because there is no single logic. Logic itself is limited. Thus, only a limitless love of wisdom can adequately capture the idea of philosophy because in transcending any given or state, it seeks to locate a higher, worthier, and better acceptable given.

Based on the above claim, it can be held that philosophy amounts to a determined *professional love of wisdom*. By professional love of wisdom, I mean to take the advancement of wisdom as a career to advance the quality of thought, to think for the public, and to apply one’s love for wisdom to address issues not just as it touches on the individual, but as it would be desired by the society. Here, philosophers apply their skills to address the ethical and social demand for wisdom from and by their societies and think about the thoughts of the society. To do this, the philosopher develops specific critical and interpretative skills to engage the world. The philosopher also reads the works of those that society has recognised for their outstanding wisdom, those we would typically call great philosophers, such as Socrates, Confucius, Lao Tzu, Aristotle, Spinoza, etc., and attempts to interpret, critique, and advance their ideas especially as they

address the fundamentals of wisdom. In addition, the philosopher also engages the problems of life by reflecting on them.

But understanding philosophy in the above sense might raise some concerns. This concern is to know the extent to which philosophy demands the creative input of other aspects of learning. What is the place of creativity in philosophy? What forms of formulation can explain the relationship between creative arts and philosophy? It seems that these concerns and questions can be best addressed by looking at the meaning and nature of creative arts and the relationship between philosophy and the creative arts. By engaging both disciplines at this level, a conception of the nature of the relationship between philosophy and creative arts can be achieved. To do this, the work will provide a descriptive definition of creative arts.

A descriptive definition of creative arts can conceive of arts as works that advertise human expression and enable human beings to manifest their idea of the world as desired and directed through the creative impulse of the human mind. Creative arts can also be defined as the expression of sentiment or feeling that can enable anyone or everyone to hear and express the same. The Collins English Dictionary defines creative arts as “imaginative, creative and non-scientific branch of knowledge considered collectively, especially as studies academically”.

But not all arts are creative. The art of engineering and the art of mathematics are good illustrations of this. It requires art and skill to imagine how a bridge should look like, just as the art of imagination is involved in different forms of mathematics. But these are not creative art. What is held to be creative arts would usually demand the inventive capacity of the individual with an imprint of what stands as unique. Creative arts, which underline the wider intellectual works that fall under the arts, generally perform several functions. But at least two broad functions can be outlined: the personal and the social function. At the personal level, art performs an individualistic function of providing the basis for expressing the uniqueness of the individual, the belief and disposition to life issues in general. In addition, art gratifies the artist’s soul and provides leisure for the spirit. At a social level, art serves to entertain the public, educate society, and provide an avenue for expressing the concept of beauty that a society may have.

The above submission is a form of descriptive definition of the function of creative arts. It may not be effective for the professional or scientific demand of the term and a theoretical definition of the subject. So, what is creative art from a professional perspective? If an attempt is to be made to achieve a professional definition of creative art, several controversies could be found. These controversies would revolve around (a) the nature of arts, (b) the social criteria of creativity, (c) the question of originality, and (d) the outcome of arts. These controversies are also embedded in the discourse on arts in general. Mark Runco claimed that originality and effectiveness are two standard criteria in defining creative arts. But this does not mean that the two items are exactly the same. Originality implies the virtue of innovation and invention. Similarly, effectiveness may take different forms, such as usefulness, fit, and appropriateness. Be that as it may, it could be argued that creative arts is about bringing something new into being. Glewance and Beghetto (75) claimed that creative art should be marked by “open-endedness, nonlinearity, pluri-perspectives and future orientation”.

In an interview with sixty-four artists, Judith Glück, Roland Polacsek-Ernest, and Flootje Unger (55) provided another insight into the nature of creative arts. The author disclosed that the artists interviewed agreed that “the creative person should have many ideas”. The interviewers revealed that intentional novelty rather than value should define and characterise creative art. Overall, what can be read from these scholars is that what seems to direct creative art includes skill, imagination, and inspiration behind the work. Whether creative art comes as visual, graphic, musical, storytelling or performative arts, the underlying character is that the virtues of skill and inspiration must characterise such a project.

From the preceding, a plausible distinction can be made between what can be called created arts and co-creative arts. Created art means those works of art that have achieved a particular form of finality such that they are already available for the senses to consume. Such arts include paintings, sculptures, drawings, paintings, etc. Co-creative art means those works of art that would spur and lead to more creativity in the sense that their consumption can lead to a reformulation of the same in a different way. Examples of these include literary works, theories, and intellectual formulations.

In light of the preceding, it can be claimed that philosophy and creative arts share some common boundaries that can be exploited to advance their course. This smacks the fact that philosophy demands the application of the creative imagination of the thinker in the same way creative art appeals to such virtues and principles as beauty, which is a valued aspect of philosophical reasoning. Indeed, this demand of philosophy can best be captured through the views of Friedrich Nietzsche when he claimed that a philosopher is “a man who never ceases to experience, see, hear, suspect, hope and dream extra-ordinary things” (quoted in Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* 10). Nietzsche’s view, which arguably reflects the imaginative and creative dimension of philosophy and its broader conception, is that philosophy justifies itself by and through the extra-vision of items, ideas, values, and entities. Creative artists would likely aim at something new or extra-ordinary, which is why originality is at the heart of the creative arts. This is a meeting ground of philosophy and creative arts.

B1. Can wisdom be loved beyond pen and paper?

The first question I shall seek to address in relation to finding a synergy between creative arts and African philosophy is whether the love of wisdom professed by philosophy can go beyond pen and paper. This question is quite imperative as creative art hugely involves a way of communicating knowledge and wisdom that goes beyond pen and paper. I also seek to address this question because one of the major charges levelled against African philosophy at its earliest inception was that traditional African society had no writing culture, and since there cannot be said to be philosophers where there is no writing culture or philosophy, it is implausible to claim that there is African philosophy. But this charge has since been debunked by Omeregbe (‘African philosophy: Yesterday and today’). An interesting aspect is whether the charge itself is proper, especially if it is discovered that there are aspects of philosophy that go beyond written words and documents. Zen Buddhism, an aspect of Indian philosophy, claims that certain insights into reality may indeed defy words and expression. If this is the case, how may one locate this? What if it is discovered that there may indeed be such aspects of wisdom that may defy pen and paper? How may one express these without recourse to such modes of knowledge such as creative arts?

To address the above questions, I abstract from the nature of concepts through which philosophical knowledge is expressed. Human understanding is a hugely conceptual project where ideas and things are named and organised through a form of meaning. But concepts do not just emerge. Concepts are built, made or founded on other concepts. Consider the concept of the radio – an organised technological invention that produces sounds, words, music, etc., through waves. Let us imagine a society where this technology is new. It would seem that the people in this locality would have a way of describing and locating this technology through which it conveys meaning to them and through which they can relate to the concept. In such a community, as in some traditional African societies, radio simply translates to ‘iron that talks’. This is the case in the traditional Igbo Nigerian community. Hence the expression “igwe na-ekwu okwu”.

But this concept only captures the sound production aspect of radio. It does not reflect the waves that produce the sound and the other forms of technology applied in the design. Thus,

the community that applies this may not know anything about the many processes that come together in the making of radio technology. But the community may have the concept of sound and speech, which are the essential output of radio technology. They may assign the aspect of waves to spirits wishing or hoping to find a synergy between the spiritual and physical in the radio mechanism. For the technology that invented the radio, the concept of 'iron that talks' may not make any sense. There is nowhere in the world that an iron talks. The concept of an iron that talks is totally different from the meaning of the radio, which is the process of transmitting sound through waves and the device associated with it. But this is not the case with the new radio community.

The instance with technology can also apply in other forms of life where each language may have to fabricate the form and ways of naming an item, an idea or an object in order to come to terms with it. Consider the illustration of a community where someone may call his brother's wife my wife. This expression could literally mean that the woman is married to two people. But this is not the case. The woman is just a wife of one person, but there is a conceptual given where this notion of wife has been absorbed, which warrants that the concept of wife be extended to another relation. Such would basically be a communal world where community undergirds and/or defines every form of interaction. This understanding may not fit into the conceptual scheme of a community of a people who do not have this understanding of human beings.

There are concepts which might defy such as formulation as claimed above. Consider the concept of eternity, infinity, limitlessness, etc., or even the concept of bisexuality that is taking root in the Western thought scheme. It would seem that concepts such as these might be better expressed in a manner that leaves the mind continually engaged to understand it. At the individual level, there may also be occurrences that may defy words and may qualify for what the Northern Igbo dialect of Nigeria may call 'Onum' – what cannot be understood. At this level, creativity comes in to supply these and provides the starting point to make meaning out of these experiences. It is here that creative art therefore comes in.

Creative art provides an understanding of what cannot be named or may be named poorly. Creative arts, such as drawings, paintings, collages, etc., produce such forms of thinking. These can help to express thoughts that might not otherwise be expressed. The implication of this is that as knowledge and wisdom advance their course through pen and paper, it may well be that other dimensions are not captured by and through this process. This is where creative art comes to play a vital role. Thus, on its own, it seems that creative art might qualify as a form of philosophy or philosophical knowledge seeking to supply what is missing in pen and paper designed for wisdom, which is what written philosophy stands for.

The next question to address in the effort to provide the ground for a synergy between philosophy and art and how to apply them to illustrate how and why this should add to the tradition of African philosophy is: How philosophical can creative arts be? I address this question in the next part of the work.

B2. How philosophical can or should creative arts be?

To address the question of the philosophical nature of creative art, I intend to consider the aspiration of creative arts to see how philosophical it is or how or whether it demands philosophy to achieve its objective. In this sense, the concern is whether the objective of creative arts implies that it should apply philosophical wisdom – broadly defined as that manner of thinking that expresses a desire for wisdom or seeks to intuit or inform the mind with the desire for wisdom – to achieve its mission. I will apply what has been called the intuition that drives the artist to address this concern. That is, whether the motivation that drives the artist has philosophical roots.

Creative art brings together the expression of emotion, feeling and reason, all tied and united together in one object such that it (creative art) has a unique power for the being of the human.

In this sense, creative arts serve as the visible expression of the human faculties and the measure of self-appreciation of the inner tendencies that provide the force and justification for existence. It provides a medium where and how the spiritual and inner longings of the human being find their expression and where the will-to-be and what-it-is-to-be are made visible. To create is to bring about life – to wish for life. So, creativity is an expression of life.

Be that as it may, at least two outstanding functions of creative arts bring out its philosophical potential. First, creative arts can serve the course of truth, which is the goal of philosophical wisdom. The second is that creative arts can lead to a disinterested outlook on life from where the quality of universality can emerge. By this, I mean that the overall desire for universalism can best be achieved through creative arts because it is a medium that subdues personal or sectional interest in favour of universal appeal. It does not mean that all creative arts function this way.

Spanish philosopher Jose Gasset (60) claimed that *aletheia* is philosophy's original name. Philosophy, he claimed, attempts "to place us in contact with the naked reality itself". But truth as a concept has been problematic because it is unclear how to measure it. However, creative art is a medium which can lead to truth or at least to facts that can lead to truth. Creative art does this by allowing the artist to function directly from their feeling (unmediated by other competing needs), which assists in revealing the truth in the best sense. Creative art also illustrates the worldview of a people and, by so doing, functions as a practical philosophy of a worldview. Creative arts is a physical illustration of the considered opinion of art because creative arts is often a meditated expression of the mind.

While all humans encounter the world with an inner disposition to fundamental principles that enable life, knowledge, feeling, reason, courage, etc., it is the immediate world of the individual – what Martin Heidegger called the facticity of *Dasein* – that enables the manifestation of these virtues and principles. Creative arts bring out the truth that can be achieved through the immediate world of the individual. A possible illustration of this is the art of humour and the art of masquerade. It is very likely that the worldview of a people can be read through what is considered humorous for them and what is not, just as a masquerade can reveal the worldview of a people. For example, there is an art of humour called *njakiri* among the Igbos of Nigeria. This humour ethics approves the use of contemptuous harsh words on an individual – based on the individual's approval anyway – intending to promote the virtue of courage. A deep reading of this art will locate how courage and self-will assume a strong virtue in Igbo life, perhaps more than other virtues. Consider again the art of masks and masquerades. Masks and masquerades often reflect the fundamental beliefs of a people, such as their sense of the spiritual or the core values of their world. A further illustration from the Igbo tradition of Nigeria shows that the *Ijele* masquerade, usually as tall and massive as a building, is often held to be the highest, biggest, and most revered masquerade. While many reasons for the birth of the *Ijele* masquerade may not be clear, it can be upheld that it illustrates the sense of greatness of the Igbo.

The second sense in which creative arts should be desired to be philosophical is that it carries or is at least supposed to carry a disinterested outlook in its mode and manner of expressing truth. With this quality, it can do minimal damage in pursuing and expressing truth. What is implied here is that a work of art should appeal to the best expression of the human mind for which it will serve as a rational ideal and which the intellect will aspire to reach the truth expressed or implied. The view expressed here is that it is by fulfilling this function that a work of creative arts is and becomes genuinely philosophical.

Consider music and dance. It is most likely that they would motivate a wide appreciation across cultures irrespective of several other aspects of the same culture, which may be held to be unacceptable. For instance, one would not need to be an American to appreciate the music and dance style of Michael Jackson, even as one may differ or disagree with some other aspects of American culture.

Indeed, in its original conception, philosophy is supposed to appeal to some mental leisure. The search for wisdom, because it is desired to have practical consequences implicitly or explicitly, is assumed to provide an intellectual bond between emotion and reason. But philosophy has severely ignored this aspect, thereby defending the course of knowledge rather than the course of wisdom. Creative arts have what it takes to bridge this gap.

B3. How creative can or should African philosophy be?

The above discussion introduces us to the next question, which demands articulating how philosophical works should apply the benefit of creative expression and potential from the African worldview. By this, it means how philosophical works can respond to or use the potential of what it means to be creative within the African context to advance its course. To address this question, I will proceed by making an important distinction between what can be called philosophy in Africa and African philosophy.

Philosophy in Africa is the presence of philosophy as an academic endeavour in Africa. It is usually applied in an academic sense to express the formal recognition of philosophy as a department of intellectual enquiry in African universities. Within the context of Sub-Saharan Africa (perhaps with the exclusion of South Africa), this recognition is said to have first been at the University of Nigeria in 1961, Makerere University in Uganda, which was founded in 1922 but first started teaching philosophy in 1967, and the University of Ibadan in 1972. In this context, philosophy is seen purely and entirely in the context of the extension of philosophical programmes of instruction from the Western academy to Africa and as a reflection of the methods of instruction and the goals of discussion implied and applied therein to Africa. This does not mean that philosophy did not exist in Africa if one should appeal to the idea of philosophy as a worldview. Indeed, in its immanent form, that is, a desire to attain some level of meaning in life and a level of understanding about the universe, in the broad sense of the term at which human beings will usually appeal to reason to follow or reject a course of action, philosophy had always existed in Africa. But formal philosophising demands further qualities; hence, there is a technical sense of the word that defines the activities of philosophers. It is this technical quality that was absent in Africa, at least in its formalised manner, and it is its introduction to Africa, at least in an academic sense, that is implied when we talk of philosophy *in* Africa.

On the other hand, there is the emergence of African philosophy in Africa. African philosophy means the African practice of philosophy and the desire to create and achieve a tradition of formal enquiry of philosophy through this inheritance. What is meant here is the effort by African philosophers to apply the African situation (broadly conceived) to demonstrate the best terms through which it can be held that a professional love of wisdom can also be obtained in Africa. Here, we discuss applying philosophy's technical demands to Africans' worldviews. Broadly conceived, African philosophy amounts to the effort to account for how thinking in the African world has demonstrated a specific measure that illustrates that wisdom has been valued and applied in the search for how best to interpret life in general and how it should be lived in addressing distinct human concerns. It is the effort to demonstrate that the virtue of wisdom, however it is held to be, has a space in the intellectual culture and traditions of modern Africa.

African philosophy is thus an academic discipline that arose as a reaction to the general contempt for African culture and reason. It attempts to demonstrate that Africans have a philosophical foundation for their beliefs and assumptions. It is equally an effort to document and demonstrate the underlying foundations of these assumptions. Its contemporary origin is usually associated with the publication of an important work entitled *Bantu Philosophy* in 1956 by Placide Tempels, a Belgian priest. This treatise was an attempt to interpret the worldview of the Baluba people of Congo. It was published as a philosophical justification of the difference between the worldview of the Baluba people of Congo and those of the Western world and an

effort to account for this difference within the realm of philosophy. Tempels' work opposed the ideals of the colonial administrative policy in Congo, which portrayed Africans as "an empty vessel, requiring education in the spheres of religion and civilization in order to be rendered truly human" (Deacon 103). This resulted in "his banishment from Congo by the Colonial administration and the Catholic Church because of this work, due to their notion of Tempels as posing a threat to their policies and practices" (110). The intellectual offence Tempels committed, or so it was held, was that if the African was recognised as having a "philosophy", the African could, by implication, be said to have civilisation. This notion presented a threat to the superiority of the Europeans, as justified by enlightenment philosophy, as well as to the economics of the colonial mission (110).

This controversial beginning captures what is called *African philosophy* today and which functions variously as an effort to interpret the African world and illustrate the wisdom behind the African thought scheme and how the wider worlds stand to function better by appropriating the wisdom from the African experience. But African philosophy has developed to transcend these reactionary origins and the divide implied. Indeed, part of the argument that can be advanced to critique this origin is whether it was necessary to respond to colonialism in the first and/or to think (of) Africa on its own terms. Should wise people react to anyone who does not understand them, does not ask questions or considers the actions or ideas of the wise as being foolish? On what intellectual authority was colonialism anchored upon to have merited the attention given to it by African philosophers?

After the effort to broadly capture the different schools of thought in African philosophy, let me next locate how creative philosophy can be in Africa by discussing how creative arts can enhance African philosophy. I shall discuss this in relation to major schools of thought in African philosophy. I do this with the belief that African philosophy is the most authentic manifestation of philosophical wisdom in the African world. This is because it advertises a formal adoption of the demands of formal philosophising as a desirable art in Africa. Here, I submit that the idea of African philosophy carries within it that touch of relevance that shows that Africans now appreciate the professional demand for wisdom. I argue that it could have been ridiculous to imagine someone from an African village who would, like Socrates, wake up early in the morning and move from one village to the other in search of the meaning of life in traditional African society. Such a person who would have thought themselves to be wise would, at best, have been considered foolish to carry such a trade. But at present, almost in the tradition of Socrates and with professionalism, people devote their lifetime searching for wisdom as an art and seeking to live just by practising this art.

To address the issue of expanding the relevance of African philosophy through creativity, let me further state that I shall do this in relation to three schools of thought in African philosophy – the ethno-philosophical school, the nationalist ideological school, and the school of professional philosophers. I am applying these three schools of thought because I believe that their concern captures and reflects the focus of all other schools. Let me also state that my interest and the illustrations I will give will be from literary creative arts.

Regarding ethno-philosophy, creativity can be applied in fashioning stories that illustrate African beliefs and through which the philosopher can sift the beliefs and values of African worldviews. Ethno-philosophy holds that African philosophy should consist in engaging the ethno-cultural worldviews of Africans. This could be done through stories. These stories could include fictional creations and myths. Romanus Egudu produced such a work when he documented several myths from the Igbo people in his work, *The Calabash of Wisdom*. In the same vein, Marcel Griaule, an anthropologist, has taken an appreciable step in this direction through his work, *Conversations with Ogotemmêli*, which is essentially an account of the mythology of the Dogon people of Mali. African philosophy can advance these myths and legendary tales by

demonstrating how and in what manner their didactic message and meaning demand and deserve a place in modern African society. By so doing, it would not just be a matter of seeking to unearth the hidden assumptions of the African worldview but doing so in a manner that applies the structures of African modernity to relive these myths and make them more desirable and significant.

Similarly, the nationalist ideological philosophy can profit from the demands of creative art by illustrating the import of its message through art. By doing this, this school of thought can translate the demands and desires of this ideological orientation in a more appreciable way to a larger audience. Nationalist ideological philosophy holds that African philosophy should be founded on the ideologies of African nationalists and political leaders. This can be done through creative arts. Several works of creative arts can be described as political or imbued with political potentialities, as can be read through many works, such as Peter Bürger (*Theory of the avant-garde*). The point is that while politics in arts could be minimal in the sense that the goal of arts is usually to appeal to human emotion and plausibly win a broad audience, there is still a desirable synergy between both. Given the concern of the nationalist ideological school of thought, which is that of fashioning out a blueprint for the governance of the African states, there is the need to explore the role of arts in achieving the goals of this school of thought through creative arts by locating the very ideals and messages expounded by this school. By so doing, arts apply politics for moral and social engineering and imbue politics with a more reflective ideal in the absence of which politics severally becomes war without bloodshed (or even sometimes with bloodshed). The benefit of applying creative arts to advance this school of thought is that it moderates the tension that is often fuelled by raw politicking because it conveys the message demanded through which creative arts can produce an impact on the human mind and, by implication, on the human person.

Concerning professional philosophy, creativity can be applied to advance this school of African Philosophy by documenting philosophical ideas through stories, novels, dramas, and poetry. Here, African philosophers can borrow from philosophical practices in other cultures. For example, in the history of Western philosophy, several philosophers documented their positions through creative works. There was Socrates, whose ideas were written in the form of a literary dialogue through his pupil Plato. Friedrich Nietzsche projected the idea of the superman around whom he advanced his theory of an ideal human being in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Some of David Hume's works – *Dialogues concerning natural religion and natural history of religion* and *Dialogue concerning natural religion* – are dialogues. Others included Jean-Paul Sartre, who wrote plays to convey his philosophy and Albert Camus, whose ideas were documented through novels. These philosophers aligned creativity to their project of philosophising and, for this reason, deserve to be emulated in the African instance. Thus, there is the need to adopt and apply these formulas to draw attention to philosophical ideas of the African world, and this will not only popularise philosophy but will equally make it a more valuable means of improving and enhancing the quality of the African mind. As a matter of fact, storytelling is a significant avenue for transmitting wisdom in traditional African society. So, reliving this art more through African professional philosophy appears necessary.

African philosophy must therefore interpret its mission beyond the purely esoteric level at which philosophical discourse was inherited in Africa to seek popular relevance through the arts. Apart from attending to the theoretical concern of philosophy and documenting ideas through scientific theories as demanded by scientific journals, there is also the other demand of what Ugwuanyi (*The poverty of jealousy*) has called "taking philosophy to the street" by way of valorising the African public with wisdom ideals to improve the wisdom content of the society. This could come through paintings, drawings, sculptures, carvings, etc.

B4. How philosophically African can creative arts be?

Finally, I engage the subject of African Philosophy and the creative arts with reference to how philosophically African creative arts should be. By this, I mean the extent to which it is desirable to draw inspiration from philosophical concerns and intuitions in an African way, that is, as harboured by Africans, to advance the culture of creative arts. Here, I mean the concept of wisdom as it is implied in the African worldview and what it would mean to be in love with wisdom within and through the demands of the African world and apply this to advance the creative arts. I map out and elaborate views that illustrate how creative arts could explore the provisions of the African worldview to create works of art that will advance the idea of wisdom and what it means to be a lover of wisdom in an African context. I further explore how it can enhance the desired relevance for the African world.

Before I address this desire, it is essential to note that this is not the first work to engage African philosophy in relation to creative arts. Several scholars preceded me in this endeavour. Although they did not claim to be philosophers in this effort, their views are considerably philosophical. Philip Meek (555) provides a solid view that can summarise the attempt to engage African philosophy with regard to creative arts when he writes:

At some risk, it may be said that African peoples articulate their philosophies through dance and masquerade performance, in sacred sculpture and speech, and on textiles and ceramics. The “invisible” ontologies and truths become “visible,” not through print but through the visual arts and dance; they are given voice through sacred musical instruments and the esoteric speech of masks. The study of African arts has progressed far beyond earlier studies in which all carvings were only “fetishes” with “magical” power. In fact, most scholarship on African arts is primarily concerned with the complex systems of thought that underlie and are revealed by the arts of African peoples.

Meek’s view is instructive to the effort to capture how philosophically African creative arts should be because it gives valid insight into how philosophically African creative arts have been. For instance, in the Igbo community of Nigeria, it was common to raise moral concerns and issues through the night masquerades (Ohaeto), just as it is common today to apply music to engage social norms, values or vices. But arts also have a deep metaphysical dimension. For instance, Achebe (436) suggests that “the purpose of art is to channel a spiritual force into an aesthetically satisfying physical form that captures the presumed attributes of that force”. In engaging African creative arts through the Igbo world, Achebe suggests that the Igbo world is essentially one of “restless dynamism and its an outward, social and kinetic quality” (435). Similarly, applying *Ikenga* as an illustration of Igbo art, Nzegwu (423) suggests that “*Ikenga* shows that human individuals are endowed with divine creative powers”.

What one can learn from these views about arts is that arts in the African thought scheme have a deep spiritual meaning and implication and that considering the view that philosophy is about locating how meaning is constituted and thereby creating and clarifying meaning, it could be said that arts is central to the effort to understand African philosophy at least in its traditional form or at least that African arts should aspire to have a philosophical character. As philosophy suffers the travails of modernity and post-modernity that seek to completely dislocate knowledge from its mental source to a technological source, it seems that African creative arts can deploy its tool to ensure that African philosophy improves through the quality ascribed to creative arts.

In addition to achieving the function outlined above – that is, applying its potential to animate and enhance philosophical wisdom – creative arts demand other functions. Creative arts must advance the transitional aspect of wisdom in Africa. This demand addressed to creative art implies the need to support the advancement of fresh thinking that addresses the African condition. This wisdom ethics deserves to be appreciated because, without this, the goal and

measure of philosophy as an enterprise devoted to the promotion of wisdom will suffer some crisis of worth and value. The claim here is that what it means to be a wise person in an African cultural context in the last hundred years may not be what it means to be a wise person in current Africa and that the values and ideals that should determine this ought to be known. Thus, the nature, culture and structure of what wisdom means suggest that creative arts, if they aim at being philosophical or exploiting the benefits of philosophical wisdom in Africa, must understand the context in which they operate and carry out their project with this in vision. For instance, creative arts must realise that African countries inhabit different cultures, and for this reason, a philosophically grounded work of art must seek how best to produce a work that will appeal to the different cultures in Zimbabwe, Ghana, or wherein all the cultures will find themselves adequately represented or respected. The implication is that works of art must go beyond advancing the concerns of a limited audience or perspective to address the concerns of larger groups.

Another option to achieve philosophical orientation for creative arts in Africa is to create works of art that carry the total weight of the African experience, which can amount to a social voice that embodies history, reason, and continuity in the African context. Such works can demonstrate how wisdom has continuity within the African world – that is, modernising and advancing creative arts in Africa to match the demands of African modernity. By this, I mean how, through creative arts, it could be seen that Africans are faithful to wisdom inheritance in Africa by transmuting the ancient/traditional/endogenous wisdom of Africa into the modern/contemporary/global demands of the term, at least in such manner that shows an advancement of wisdom ethics within the African world.

There is another desirable option through which creative works can profit from the African experience. This is that of applying creativity in Africa to advance the idea of aesthetics within its demand in the African world. Here, I mean the ability to construct and reconstruct the ethics of beauty within the demands of the African world. The demand here is to demonstrate how it can be held that what is within the African world is enough to produce what should be held to be beautiful within the intellectual and productive resources of this world. Here, philosophy within the African context would wish to know how valid it is to hold that beauty can be imported, such as when the resources and machines that define a form of beauty are not founded within the immediate world of the people. African philosophy would wish to interrogate the wisdom that represents this idea of beauty and the psychology of this theory of beauty in relation to the spiritual security demanded by the human person. These demands fall collectively within the nature and challenges of the African social world. Some of these challenges include (i) the challenge of social reconstruction, that is, of raising a society with a robust social will and a desirable image of the social self; (ii) the challenge of identity and dignity, that is, that of articulating the distinctive desirable mark of Africanness and the grounds on which the mark recommends that it should live to be the best of which it can and should be; (iii) the challenge of African aesthetics, that is, to illustrate that what is held to be beautiful is rationally justifiably so, and not as held by a concept of beauty rooted outside the African worldview or at least as advanced from this worldview.

Conclusion

The focus of this article has been to provide views and positions through which it can be held that philosophy and creative arts have plausible grounds for synergy in Africa. This is with the view to advancing the project of African philosophy through this study. This is urgent since African philosophy has sought more of its relevance through an appeal to a considerably objectivist cum scientific option than the creative option. In this way, the faculty of reason has been more invoked in the effort to build an African philosophical tradition than the faculty of

imagination. Hopefully, this effort will lead to fresh and more comprehensive thoughts in this direction. This work desires that more pieces that appeal more to the method of creative arts would emerge from African philosophy through some inspirations that may be gained through this effort.

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Notes

- ¹ This includes Cole (*Mbari, art and life among the Owerri Igbo; Icons*), Douglas (*African art as philosophy*), Glaze (*Art and death in a Senufo village*), Nooter (*Secrecy*), Thompson (*African art in motion; Flash of the spirit*), Thompson, Robert Farris, and Joseph Cornet (*The four moments of the sun*), Vogel (*Aesthetics of African art*), Diop ('African art: debates and controversies around a concept'), and Nzegwu ('Art and community').

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Modernity and the Quest for Democracy in Africa: The Case of Ethiopia

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Abstract: This paper deals with the philosophical aspects of modernity and democratic change in Africa with a focus on Ethiopia. The traditional or religious nature of Ethiopia's political and economic system has posed a serious challenge to modernization. In addition, the contemporary experiment with ethnic politics and tribalism has exacerbated the problem. The country's continued existence has been endangered because of its repeated failures at modernization. I therefore argue that one of the major challenges to democracy and modernization in Ethiopia is the inability to transcend ascriptive, primordialist, and tribalist criteria of political membership.

Keywords: ethnophilosophy, Ethiopian nationalism, ethnic nationalism, modernity, professional philosophy, pragmatic politics

Introduction

Contemporary political philosophy has been concerned with liberty, equality, and fraternity as the three basic ideals of the modern democratic age. Regardless of differences in their methodology, the great political ideologies of the past three centuries, such as liberalism, socialism, and nationalism, offered their respective visions of the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity (Kymlicka 208). Values such as liberty, equality and fraternity are modern values with a universal appeal. Andreas Eshete (1) states that "historical self-consciousness", or the capacity to think retroactively about the past to compare it with our own time, is the conspicuous mark of modernity. Eshete seems to indicate the considerable agreement among Western scholars that the West is the birthplace of modernity regardless of its exact date of birth (Eshete 1). However, the idea that the West is the birthplace of modernity is disputed by contemporary scholars (see Taiwo; Dussel). Eshete (1–2) argues that even though there are several historical phenomena associated with the advent of modernity, the attempt to single out a specific phenomenon is disputable. He claims that the attempt to trace the origins of modernity risks a category mistake because periods are not facts but conceptual tools, which we use to understand the past retroactively to frame our imagination. However, periodization may lead to errors in historical thought because it may lead to factual errors about the exact time when important things happened (Eshete 1–2). Eshete (2) argues that there is no binding "explanation of human progress."

Western thinkers such as Hegel, Marx, and Weber proposed sophisticated explanations of human progress. Marx argued that "constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty, and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones" (quoted in Eshete 2). Thus, the imperative to improve the technical forces of production changes social organization. There is a special image of modernity as the end not of linear temporal history but in the Hegelian sense of history as the realization of human freedom (Eshete 5).

Modernity marks the end of traditional or religious authority, ushering in for humanity a new sense of freedom through secularization. This implies that the realization of individual freedom poses the challenge of justifying the moral foundations of the exercise of coercion by the state, namely the question of legitimacy. Furthermore, with the increasing secularization of society, the imperative for religious and political pluralism in the form of tolerance has become the order of the day. Rawls (xxi) argues that the plurality of philosophical, political, religious, and moral doctrines is the unavoidable feature of a democracy.

The modern world has parted company with the old quest for a universal vision of the good life in the sense that the private and public spheres cannot be reconciled without risking a compromise in the form of tolerance and pluralism. Thus, pluralism of views implies that ethical problems can be resolved only by rational and critical argumentation. This makes justice the first virtue of social institutions. The apparent prophecy of the end of history in the sense of the triumph of Western liberalism has been a subject of controversy. Weber was disquieted by the triumph of instrumental reason despite his appreciation of scientific disenchantment. Marx supported the capacity for self-government embedded in modern democratic constitutions but was also wary of the dangers of capitalism and bourgeois democracy. This article aims to demonstrate that the failure of modernization and democracy in Ethiopia is due to the inability to envision a pragmatic political philosophy that represents major interests within our nation.

Method

This article adopts the hermeneutic method of interpreting and discussing primary and secondary literature on African philosophy, politics, political economy, and history with an emphasis on Ethiopia. Primary documents refer to the works of prominent African and Western scholars, while secondary documents are commentaries or critical reviews of these scholars. This research is purely qualitative as it does not attempt to introduce quantitative variables in the study.

Discussion and Results

Debates on modernity and tradition in African philosophy

The origin of the African philosophical debate can be associated with the Western representation of Africa and the African reaction to it. In general, the debate on African philosophy is characterized as the rationality debate because the central point of contention is the category of reason, “a value which is believed to stand as the great divide between the civilized and the uncivilized, the logical and the mystical” (Masolo 1). This debate seems to have taken two forms: the first is the affirmation of pre-colonial African cultural values by calling upon a return to them, while the second is the affirmation of the universality of human experience and thought regardless of its racial, cultural, ethnic, and geographical origin.

One of the most important categories in African philosophy is the notion of return. This notion was introduced by Aimé Césaire’s 1939 book, *Return to My Native Land*. In this work, Césaire introduced new vocabulary to explain the Black predicament, the most important being the notion of negritude. The concept of negritude entails a commitment to restore the dignity and humanity of black people through the metaphorical return to the African past. Negritude was originally supposed to be a historical consciousness or awareness of blackness, given the matrix of power relations and manipulations in the global context (Masolo 1–2). According to Masolo, Césaire attributes two meanings to the word return. The first is a real spatial repatriation to the original land, namely Africa. The second meaning involves a metaphorical appeal to an awareness or consciousness of one’s blackness (2). The idea of return has divided African philosophers into two major schools of thought: the traditionalist school and the modernist school.

The proponents of the traditionalist school are known as ethnophilosophers. The literal meaning of ethnophilosophy is a philosophy that studies culture/people/race. From a broader sense, ethnophilosophy has to do with the “recording of the beliefs, values, categories and assumptions that are implicit in the language, practices and beliefs of African cultures” (Etieyibo 94). Ethnophilosophers believe that philosophy is a communal property as opposed to an individual activity (95). On the contrary, Modernist or universalist philosophers believe that (African) philosophy is a universal, rational, and critical activity of individual thinkers. Most of the proponents of this view are trained within the Western philosophical traditions. They “are mostly united by their attempts to undermine ethnophilosophy as authentic philosophy; namely, they embraced a universal view of the methods and concerns of philosophy” (96).

The paradigm of modernization that ethnophilosophy suggests is a critique of Eurocentrism and the revival of African cultures. Tempels believe that African development and modernization require a firm grasp of the nature of the African soul. The earliest articulation of this line of thought can be traced back to Placide Tempels, who was a Belgian missionary. Tempels’s mission of Christianization coincides with the issue of African modernity. He laments that missionary work only managed to create stunted elites called *évolués* (Tempels 19). Tempels points out that the *évolués* are stunted intellectuals without foundation either within their native tradition or the Western Christian tradition (19). He argues that the reason for this facile evangelization is the inability to reconcile traditional philosophy with Western Christianity. As a result, deep in the soul of the *évolués*, traditional philosophy remains intact. This is owing to the failure to synthesize Christianity with the soul of the native, which by implication means poor evangelization. Tempels deduces that this is the result of the colonial narrative that depicts African traditions as “childish and savage”. This characterization, he argues, stunted the soul of the Bantu. As a result, missionary work lost the spiritual prowess that animates its message (20).

Western missionaries failed to promote authentic African Christianity owing to their contempt for the indigenous philosophy of the natives (20). Thus, for Christianity to flourish in the soul of Africans, it must be rooted in the native philosophy. To that end, Tempels studied the Bantu ontology that forms the basis of Bantu philosophy.

Apparently, Tempels’ reflections are pertinent to the attempt to frame the problem of development and modernization of Africa. It forms a firm basis for the critique of Eurocentrism and the consequent marginalization of African traditions and values, arguing that the effort to modernize and civilize Africans cannot materialize unless it has a substantive basis in African indigenous philosophy. This strand of thought in African philosophy locates the roots of underdevelopment in dehumanization and consequent loss of identity. This is owing to facile Westernization and the resultant split between the native and Western personalities hindering a genuine transformation.

According to Bashir Diagne (10), Tempels’s Bantu philosophy seeks to counter the colonial narrative by uncovering the philosophical roots of traditional thinking. Thus, the existence of African philosophy should be affirmed beyond reasonable doubt because ethnophilosophers believe that the denial of philosophy to Africans is tantamount to the denial of the humanity of Africans. Ethnophilosophers are convinced that attempts to resuscitate tradition would help restore African dignity, effecting mental decolonization and inventiveness. This is believed to pave the way for the African path to development, as it recommends a clean break from Eurocentrism and a forceful assertion of African identity. One may perceive a call for intellectual repatriation, which is the central theme of negritude and African socialism. The attempt to articulate the African cultural and spiritual heritage by way of a holistic Black identity is distinctively ethnophilosophical because ethnophilosophy identifies philosophy with communal thought. Socialist principles are assumed to resonate with the cultural patterns and practices of Black identity. Thus, for the proponents of the traditionalist school of ethnophilosophy, African modernization is concomitant with the restoration of precolonial norms of Africa.

Modernist professional philosophers are against the affirmation of African holism or holist African identity. They argue that African holism risks affirming African backwardness and underdevelopment. Given the emancipative potential of reason and science, any successful move towards modernity and development must be premised on individual freedom, equality, and rationality. The more we insist on African holism, the higher the affirmation of African otherness and anachronism. The affirmation of holist values justifies the call for a civilizing mission instead of contradicting it. Messay Kebede points out that the critique of ethnophilosophy revolves around three points: first, it is the affirmation of the anthropological discourse on Africa. Secondly, it is based on a wrong conception of philosophy. Thirdly, it has untoward implications for Africa's development and modernization (Kebede, 'Development and the African philosophical debate' 48). The first point is that the affirmation of holism is a disservice to African rationality and agency because it affirms the colonial discourse according to which Africans are not capable of integrating into the modern way of life without the guidance and supervision of the West. Thus, the affirmation of hierarchical and holist values reinforces the colonial discourse endorsing Levy Bruhl's attribution of primitive mentality. Ethnophilosophy is a self-imposed confession of African subordination as opposed to the restoration of African dignity and culture. Professional philosophers (Bodunrin; Hountondji; Wiredu) demand parting company with the holist and hierarchical African past. They argue that the colonial and neo-colonial discourse is premised on the denial of African membership in the normal human category.

African philosophy must critique the invention of difference since it is the first step towards marginalization and subordination. Thus, African philosophy must be a critique of holism and traditional hierarchy. Modernist professional philosophers contend that the best way to disparage the colonial discourse is to expose the untenable epistemological and scientific foundations of Western anthropology. The point is to highlight the procedural and constructivist nature of the colonial claim to objective knowledge about traditional societies. Moreover, the nature of ethnophilosophy is problematic from a philosophical point of view since it endorses a worldview that is implicit in the collective unconscious of African societies as philosophy proper. Thus, this line of thought undermines philosophy as an individual thought by succumbing to a collective consciousness.

Professional philosophers argue that the affirmation of collective thought is against the specific quality of philosophy (Kebede, 'Development and the African philosophical debate' 49). Considering the need for individual thought, collective philosophy is an oxymoron. But the very existence of this debate in the form of literature is a case in point for the existence of African philosophy. We may need to rethink the communal and collective foundation of ethnophilosophy to open the space for individual freedom, equality, and rationality. This does not mean that African philosophy is concerned just with the conflict between tradition and modernity today. Rather, given the subject of this paper, namely the relationship between modernity and tradition, I find it imperative to dwell on this distinction to elucidate my point.

The meaning and nature of democracy

Democracy is founded on the consent of the governed, who act as self-legislators. Freedom of choice is critical to democratic practice because people are free to pursue what they deem appropriate for honourable existence. As a result, individual autonomy is considered the guiding principle of human rights and thus cannot be violated unless a greater moral good is at stake (Gaus 1–2; Shapiro 191; Ikuenobe 571). Nobody has the right to impose their will on other individuals without their consent. Paradoxically, however, the state has the exclusive right to make and enforce laws, and citizens who are not directly involved in the legislative process are nonetheless expected to adhere to these laws. Forcing citizens to obey laws enacted by others appears to be a violation of human rights.

A democratic state must be grounded on the recognition of individual autonomy as the guiding principle of human rights (Gaus 1–2; Shapiro 191; Ikuenobe 571). This, in turn, calls into question the legitimacy of a state's authority in relation to individual rights because it results in the conviction that one has an obligation to obey laws that are not the result of one's free will (Raz 76–77; Rubenfeld 195). Thus, what is the moral justification for this seemingly difficult conundrum in which the state's exclusive right to make and enforce laws and the right of individuals to their freely chosen values are at odds? Democracy is the most viable moral justification for the legitimacy of the state, given the imperative to respect individual autonomy (Shapiro 190; Forst and Flynn 2; Ikuenobe 571).

Democracy is the only means to institute a government freely elected by the people to serve their needs. This requires the participation of citizens in the decision-making process either directly by themselves or through freely elected representatives who rule on their behalf. The elected representatives rule to serve the people's needs and interests. The people's representatives are simply delegated to act on their behalf; in a sense, they are trustees delegated to pursue the people's goals. As a result, we can conclude that the foundation of democratic rule is an accountable representation that serves the needs and interests of the people (Ikuenobe 572). Democracies are morally justifiable because they allow citizens to rule directly or through elected officials. This implies that the legitimacy of a democratic government is considered to emanate from the will of the citizens. Thus, obedience to the law implies submitting to rules that we have freely enacted.

The tension between individual autonomy and obedience to the state's laws can be resolved in democratic governance. This does not mean that the state always relies on the judgement of its individual members to make public policy and laws. Without a proper legal procedure that ensures the appropriate management and control of conflicts of interest, risks, and perceived threats, it is impossible to sustain lasting peace and order. Thus, it is imperative to have a legitimate government that takes charge of the state's affairs based on the people's will. The norms that underlay the nature of good governance are universal suffrage, popular participation, consent, the promotion and protection of human rights, justice, equality, and respect, among others (Ikuenobe 572). A democratic form of government should meet these requirements of good governance. Apart from moral reasons, there are pragmatic, functional, anthropological, and other reasons for respecting individual autonomy. However, this discussion focuses on the moral justifications for individual autonomy. Individual autonomy as a guiding principle of democratic governance has two major moral justifications: consequentialist and deontological (572).

Consequentialists value individual autonomy for its perceived benefits for good governance, whereas deontologists advocate individual autonomy for its intrinsic value to good governance. A consequentialist argument for individual autonomy is more compelling than a deontological one since individual autonomy is valued for its outcomes in enhancing accountability, good governance, human rights, and democratic institutions. Nothing would be sacred about respecting individual autonomy if it were not valuable for society. Thus, it is not plausible to argue that we should respect individual rights because they are good in themselves. The deontological argument implicitly draws on some perceived benefits, although it does not endorse valuing an ideal for its consequences (Gaus 359). One may argue that the justification for accepting a particular belief is not a function of its consequences. But this does not mean the belief in question can be justified without appealing to some empirical standards of adequacy. Hence, the justification of a moral belief always draws on its possible outcomes on human well-being. The justification of a moral belief cannot be a matter of pure procedure (Ikuenobe 573).

The principles of democratic governance may prescribe some procedures to bring about a certain outcome. For example, the right is neither prior nor consequential to the good; rather, the right and the good are interdependent. In other words, the procedures of democratic governance

cannot be dissociated from the results they are supposed or expected to produce. Ultimately, a particular procedure becomes the norm of democratic governance if it is the outcome of a contract among the majority of the citizenry while at the same time providing for the rights of the minority (Rubinfeld 196). Contract or agreement among the governed is a procedure endorsed for its perceived benefits for democratic governance. A democratic constitution is a procedural contract signed by the governed to run the affairs of a state. But constitutionalism is not a recipe for tyranny; instead, it protects citizens from tyranny of any kind (Raz; Rubinfeld; Ikuenobe).

The context of modernization and democracy in Ethiopia

My discussion in this part of the paper heavily relies on Messay Kebede's work titled *Survival and modernization: Ethiopia's enigmatic present: a philosophical discourse*. Kebede argues that modernization is inextricably bound with survival and that Western modernity is the outgrowth of the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman heritage (Kebede, *Survival and modernization* 243). Modernity marked the revival of the classical world through reinvigorating the Greco-Roman legacy (243). Studies indicate that one of the factors that contributed to the economic growth of East Asian countries is the legacy of Buddhism and Confucianism (Bell). Some scholars contend that colonialism and modernization led to the loss of identity, resulting in poverty and underdevelopment (Marzagora 1; Kebede, *Survival and modernization* 243–244).

But modernization and underdevelopment are not coterminous. There must indeed be signposts that set an example in our Ethiopian or African tradition in the struggle to modernize. But the mere enthusiasm to revive tradition for its own sake is not helpful aside from endorsing our idiosyncrasies in the name of authenticity. It is true that thinking for ourselves implies saying no to any influence that may impoverish us mentally, economically, and politically. So, this mental attitude may engender Ethiopian nationalism or African nationalism. Quoting Rostow, Kebede argues that nations seek to uproot their traditions not to make more money but to ensure their security (Kebede, *Survival and modernization* 244). He also argues that the case of Ethiopia is paradoxical because Ethiopia is a country with a very long history but, at the same time, one of the poorest in the world. The stability of the country is in jeopardy because of its inability to modernize (Marzagora 4; Kebede, *Survival and modernization* 244).

There are several conjectures to explain why Ethiopia failed to modernize. Christopher Clapham argues that Ethiopia's lag can be attributed to geographical reasons as "standing obstacles to its development in the present" (Clapham quoted in Kebede, *Survival and modernization* 245). Kebede points out that other Western observers confirm Clapham's observation, attributing the country's failure to modernize to natural obstacles and remoteness (Kebede, *Survival and modernization* 245). But Kebede highlights that Addis Hiwot, an Ethiopian intellectual, rejects the "isolation argument" 'because the isolation argument is Eurocentric because it presumes civilization comes from without. Thus, Hiwot then attributes Ethiopia's failure to modernize to the absence of peace caused by protracted wars, the nature of social organization and the slave trade (245). The first two factors are closer to the truth, given the history of the country. Kebede quotes Gebru Tareke to substantiate the claim that Ethiopian leaders were ineffective in terms of nation-building despite their relative success in state creation and consolidation (245). He argues that ethnic and cultural diversity has posed a series of challenges to modernization (245). He also states that "the Ethiopian state has for long represented the interests of one particular ethnic group, the Amhara, with the consequence that the country was torn by constant ethnic tensions and conflicts" (245). This problem is further aggravated by the conquest of peoples from different cultural and ecological backgrounds by Emperor Menelik II (Young 192; Fiseha 439; Clapham 3). This, in turn, brought about ethnic and religious disparity and led to the final overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie's regime, which was attributed to Amhara domination or Amharization, especially by the detractors of the regime (Marzagora 5; Kebede *Survival and*

modernization 245–246; Young 192; Abbay 270). The consequent ethnic and religious divisions in the country made nation-building and modernization impossible. Ethnic liberation movements started to flourish in the country, destroying in the process “the institution of democratic norms, so essential to modernization” (Kebede, *Survival and modernization* 246).

Modernity is driven by individual liberty, instrumental or technological mastery, division of labour, bureaucratic rationalization, and private property ownership, in contrast to status-driven or ascriptive ownership of property (Clapham 3; Giddens 12; Kebede, *Survival and modernization* 246). Modern political culture challenges traditional authority and ascriptive legitimacy to uphold individual liberty and equality.

One of Ethiopia’s major obstacles to modernization and development is the absence of democratic consciousness (Clapham 3). The notion of democratic consciousness implies belief in individual liberty, equality, justice, and human dignity. These values are fundamental to a modern, well-ordered society. On the contrary, in Ethiopia, ethnic politics, ethnic loyalty, ascriptive political economy of nepotism, corruption and parochialism have become the order of the day (Záhořík 257; Kebede, *Survival and modernization* 246). As Kebede writes, “People were less and less able to refer to objective, impersonal criteria, preferring instead partial and narrow norms. Rather than catching up with modernity, Ethiopia was turning its back on it” (Kebede, *Survival and modernization* 246).

The absence of peace is one of the root causes of poverty and backwardness in Ethiopia. The political system is devoid of a democratic institutional backup, and thus, it created mutually suspicious ethnic factions. In addition, the traditional economic arrangement is hostile to modern forms of production (Young 196). For instance, the Gebar system was a traditional economic system based on exploiting the farmer without legally protecting private property. This system favoured just the owner of the land and his political affiliates (Kebede, *Survival and modernization* 247). The Gebar system prevented the emergence of wealthy middle-class farmers, which would have brokered the balance between the peasantry and landowners (247).

Kebede also points out that the Ethiopian mindset resists mobility through hard work, innovation, and investment (247). Ethiopian social mobility “values power over people as opposed to power over things” (247). The landholding system hijacked Ethiopian feudalism making the transition to capitalism impossible. Kebede states that European nations took advantage of feudalism in transitioning to modern liberal capitalist democracies (248). In Ethiopia, the traditional economic system was completely unable to transform into a viable and working economy. Landlords only cared about one thing: amassing wealth at the expense of peasants, not creating wealth through investment. Since the landlords’ tenure was backed by the state, they felt insecure, while the peasants felt helpless because the landlords would seize their harvest (248).

The concept of property rights was not part of the legal system, which entrenched dependency and centralized power. The economic system was not conducive to autonomous property ownership. Furthermore, the political system was opposed to democracy and democratic values. For example, power is valued not for what it does for the people but for the benefits it confers. Instead of the modern ideals of liberty, equality, and brotherhood, political dispensation relies on concrete ties like kinship, regionalism, and tribalism. Modern impersonal bureaucracy that is based on rationalization is almost non-existent. Authority is regarded as a personal gift rather than an impersonal position that must be filled by everyone (249).

I claim that one of the challenges to Ethiopian modernization and development is the absence of a proper Ethiopian bourgeoisie. This can be explained by the reasons that Messay Kebede outlines, as shown in my partial review of his foundational work on Ethiopian modernity. These reasons are a long history of war and conflict, ascriptive political culture, traditional and archaic relations of production exemplified by the Gebar system, the absence of legal protection for private property, and poor work ethic. The above-mentioned social, political, economic,

and historical reasons made the rise of a robust Ethiopian bourgeoisie impossible. But this does not imply that modernity is equated with the rise of a strong bourgeoisie. In other words, there are social, cultural, and political reasons for the rise of modernity; the existence of a strong bourgeoisie is just one aspect of it.

Marxist roots of contemporary Ethiopian politics

The struggle for greater equality and freedom in Ethiopia began with the infatuation of Addis Ababa University students with Marxism. Andreas Eshete (14) describes the Ethiopian Student Movement as “a midwife of Ethiopian modernity”. The Ethiopian Student Movement exemplifies the modern quest for justice and democratic governance in Ethiopia. Marxism has exercised significant influence on Ethiopian intelligentsia since the 1960s. This ideology has shaped the political psychology of radical intellectuals like never before. The onset of Marxism on the Ethiopian political scene was marked by the growing dissatisfaction of university students with the imperial regime and their unrelenting demand for revolutionary regime change in the country. The national question was the bone of contention among the university students during the Ethiopian Students Movement (ESM).

The trailblazer of the question of nationalities in Ethiopia was a radical university student named Walelign Mekonnen, who was at the forefront of the Ethiopian students’ movement. Although his concern is legitimate, I argue that his legacy prevails in the increasingly ethnically and geographically polarized political landscape that has come to define the current political status quo of the country. Five years after the 1960 abortive coup, Haile Selassie I University students demonstrated against the Haile Selassie government with a provocative demand, “land to the tiller” (Tibebu 346). The students snatched the slogan “land to the tiller” as a Marxist catchphrase to ground their Marxist criticism of the Ethiopian state. However, the problem with using Marxist theory to explain the Ethiopian political reality is its hostility to the psychological makeup of the Ethiopian people and the historical reality of the time. Ethiopia’s centuries-old monarchy was abolished with the reign of a military government led by Mengistu Hailemaria, who was ousted in 1991 (Khisa 1).

In May 1991, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) took over power after defeating the Ethiopian government. Tibebu (346) particularly notes that “EPRDF came out of the Marxist movement and its Marxist core, the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray, praised the Albanian brand of Marxism, it ceased to officially identify itself as Marxist by the time it seized state power on 28 May 1991” (346). Yet, the EPRDF has made the national question the crux of its constitutional philosophy and the source of its legitimacy (Opalo and Smith 4; Fiseha 440).

It has been nearly three decades since Ethiopia adopted a multicultural, anti-foundationalist political philosophy driven by its political elite, who relegated the grand narratives and pre-suppositions that the country was founded on as the convictions of the ruling group in the country, namely the Amhara aristocracy. This phenomenon is marked by the Marxist criticism of Ethiopian university students concerning the foundations of the Ethiopian nation. Ethiopian nationalism and ethnic nationalism characterize the contemporary ideological divide in Ethiopia (Fiseha 440; Abbay 269). Ethiopian nationalists are accused of promoting a political doctrine which is inherently and inescapably rooted in the psychology, culture, and history of a distinct ethnic group (the Amhara). Hence, according to critics, Ethiopia is a colonial empire which historically marginalized and oppressed the Oromos and other ethnic groups in the country (Jalata 382). Gudina (158) also argues that at the heart of the current crisis of the Ethiopian state are contending nationalisms, which are the source of “multiple competing interests, contradictory visions, and clashes of dreams, especially among contending elites who are moving the spirit of ethnic nationalism”. He explains that the hegemonic interests of Tigrayans, the secessionist

tendency among the Oromos and the nostalgia for the past among the Amharas are classic cases of contradictory visions and dreams among the elites (Gudina 158).

This is an interesting philosophical problem in modern Ethiopian politics: we envision our place in the world and our role within it by creating narratives or stories and claiming they are divine revelations that are universally true and which we believe with the strongest of convictions that they work for all people across the board regardless of their culture, history and tradition; yet our worldviews are inescapably constrained and limited by our particular historical predicaments.

Opponents of moral universalism argue that the project of modernity, which aims to create a universal political and moral community, has “suppressed cultural diversity and intensified oppression and exploitation in the name of common citizenship and cultural universalism” (Jalata 386). Ethnic nationalists who criticize Ethiopian nationalism can be put in this category because they contend that the Ethiopian state is imperialist (382). Ethnic nationalists claim that the historic Ethiopian state has denied the cultural, linguistic, and political rights of nationalities with different cultural, historical, and linguistic identities (Jalata 390).

The question of nationalities, which university students in the 1960s took up, was meant to assert the right to self-determination of different ethnic communities currently described as nations and nationalities. Advocates of the rights of nationalities argue that the values and norms imposed by the Ethiopian state on different ethnic communities are unjust infringements on local cultures and worldviews. State oppression and domination breed structural injustices in society. Ethnic nationalists contend that there was a structural injustice in the Ethiopian state because of the historic Ethiopian state’s domination and oppression of marginalized ethnic groups (Jalata 382). This contention has exercised a considerable influence on Ethiopian politics since the 1960s. Still, I contend that instead of redressing the structural injustice that has prevailed in the country, it has created deep conflicts between peoples and ways of life, creating an unbridgeable ideological rift among the Ethiopian people, particularly the elite.

Conclusion

The failure to find pragmatic solutions to competing political ideologies in Ethiopia has led to repeated grand failures at modernization (Gudina). In the name of addressing the question of nationalities, the EPRDF has imposed an ideology that denies a political, economic, and social space for the ethnically mixed and supra-ethnic groups in the country. Consequently, a sizable segment of the people in the country has been excluded from the political system because of the incommensurability of their identity and ideology with the official state doctrine of the priority of nations and nationalities as the rallying agenda of Ethiopian politics. The question of nationalities has marginalized civic nationalism in the country as opposed to ending authoritarianism and ethnic tensions.

It is the responsibility of the state to create favourable conditions for the equal representation of the major interests, demands and ideologies of all groups in the country. For this to happen, all stakeholders should deliberate on the best course of action through a genuine commitment to democratic values and principles.

The nearly three decades reign of EPRDF has marginalized civic or Ethiopian nationalists by summarily dividing the country along primordial ethnic lines. This, in turn, denied the rights of those who do not want to join the ethnic bandwagon. It is argued that those groups in Ethiopia are liberal, supra-ethnic and ethnically mixed groups who value civic union as a principle of political organization and mobilization. Nevertheless, the rights of those who prefer to organize themselves along ethnic lines should be respected and upheld, but not at the expense of those who disagree with them.

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Kriolu vs. Portuguese: Cape Verde's Linguistic Postcolonial Identity Crisis

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Abstract: A group of ten formerly uninhabited islands off the coast of Senegal, Cape Verde was established as a slave colony by the Portuguese in the 1500s and has been struggling to construct a cohesive cultural identity since winning independence from Portugal in 1975. That postcolonial struggle is, in many ways, a linguistic one. This article shows how Cape Verdeans confronted the language of their oppressors through the hybrid “forked tongue” of Kriolu, a “secret language” that subverted and resisted Portuguese in the struggle for independence in the twentieth century. However, because Cape Verdeans are primarily a hybrid people with a hybrid language, the island nation continues to experience a crisis of identity as it grapples with accepting or rejecting both its African and European roots.

Keywords: Cape Verde, Portuguese, postcolonialism, Africa, Creole

According to Abdul JanMohamed, every postcolonial nation attempts to define itself in order to “retrieve the value and dignity of a past insulted by European representation” (quoted in Parry 46). However, the unique problem faced by a nation like Cape Verde is that it can never fully recover its pre-colonial past because it does not have one. Cape Verdeans cannot disentangle a pre-colonial African identity from the direct influences of Portuguese colonialism because, as Fetson Kalua explains, “the colonizer and colonized are so very deeply implicated in one another that any discourse about origins smacks of paradoxes” (25). Consider the following Cape Verdean myth, which expresses this ambivalence of identity:

In the beginning, Cape Verde was part of the African continent. The Cape Verdeans were a rowdy bunch, though, always buying and selling stuff, always creating disorder and making noise wherever they went. They caused so much confusion that the rest of Africa got together and decided to separate Cape Verde from Africa by sending it far away, to the middle of the Ocean. But it wasn't long before the Cape Verdeans invented the ship and were out and about, causing a ruckus once again. The rest of Africa then decided to break Cape Verde into ten little pieces, in the hope of keeping them apart and quiet, but they readily found a way to get together and make noise again. It was then that the Africans did the worst thing they could possibly have done—they took the rain away from Cape Verde. From then on, Cape Verdeans have scattered throughout the world, taking noise and confusion everywhere they go. (Rego 157)

This origin myth, recorded by Marcia Rego during a conference on “Cape Verdean-ness” in Cape Verde's capital of Praia, Santiago, speaks of a people clamoring to recover a pre-colonial past in a postcolonial era. As Rego points out, Cape Verdeans in the myth identify themselves as “being of Africa, but not African, just as they are also of Portugal but hardly Portuguese” (157). The myth also shows the restlessness of the Cape Verdean people, “invented the ship and were out and about” after Africa tried to keep them isolated in the middle of the sea. Most tellingly, however, the “noise,” “ruckus,” and “confusion” mentioned in the myth speak to the disruptive, irreverent language of the Cape Verdeans, a Creole language derived from Portuguese and African tribal languages referred to as *Kriolu*.¹ To paraphrase Gloria Anzaldua, Cape Verde's linguistic identity is “twin skin” to Cape Verde's ethnic identity (Anzaldua 81).

Problematically, the hybridity of Cape Verde's language and ethnicity² complicates the cultural identity of Cape Verdean people as the nation debates whether it is more African or more European through its use of Kriolu or Portuguese. If ethnic identity and linguistic identity really are twin skins of each other, then inquiring into the Cape Verdean language dynamics also causes us to question the Manichean binary of Africanness and Europeaness within a culture that is so completely rooted in a more intricate and multifaceted hybridity: one which cannot be so easily defined.

The Birth of Kriolu

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said (214) asks, "How does a culture seeking to become independent imagine its own past?" Said uses the Ariel-Caliban polarity discussed in Cuban critic Robert Fernandez Retamar's "Caliban" to outline three choices faced by the colonized subject. The first choice is to do what Ariel does and become a "willing servant of Prospero"; the second is to do as Caliban does and accept his "mongrel past" while not rejecting the possibilities for "Future development"; and the third choice is to "be a Caliban who sheds his current servitude and physical disfigurements in the process of discovering his essential, pre-colonial self" (Retamar 214). The third option seems the most recuperative and empowering for the colonized subject. Still, it is not an option for the Cape Verdean people because their pre-colonial past pre-dates Cape Verde itself and is, consequently, irrecoverable. As the title of Clarence Walker's critique of Afrocentrism suggests, "We can't go home again." In other words, Afrocentrism is problematic for African peoples because it attempts to elide the consequences of centuries of colonial oppression. Walker asserts that "Rather than transcend the racialism of nineteenth-century Aryanism, Afrocentrism only repeats it" (Walker 16). Afrocentrism is particularly insufficient to envision the reconstruction of Cape Verdean identity because the island nation was only ever used as a slave outpost. Prior to the Portuguese enslavement of African people in Cape Verde, the islands were uninhabited. Further, in terms of language origins, Derek Pardue observes that "Cape Verdeans are unique in the history of European colonialism because their lingua franca was already a hybrid with Portuguese and a range of established African languages" (Pardue 17). However, unlike Caliban, who, according to Retamar, is forced to use the same language as his colonizer in order to "curse him, to wish that the 'red plague' would fall on him" (Retamar 14), Cape Verdeans have found subversive power in the formation of their own Creole language.

Frantz Fanon claims that "Every colonized people... finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country" (*Black Souls, White Masks* 18). In coming "face to face with the language of the civilizing nation," which in the case of Cape Verde is Portuguese, Cape Verdeans were able to create the hybrid "forked tongue" of Kriolu, a language that "sprang out," similar to the Chicano language Gloria Anzaldua writes about in *Borderlands*, of "the need to identify ourselves as a distinct people. We needed a language with which we could communicate with ourselves, a secret language" (Anzaldua 77).

The "secret language" of the Cape Verdeans arose out of a need for enslaved people from a wide range of African tribes who barely understood each other to establish a common language that subverted and resisted the language of their oppressors. Derived from Portuguese and mixed with various borrowings from West African languages, notably Mandingo and Senegambian (Williams 29), Kriolu became the unofficial language of the colonized in the early days of colonization and was eventually utilized as a cultural instrument for strategic essentialism in the struggle for independence in the twentieth century. In the beginning, however, Kriolu emerged organically and mirrored the hybrid ethnicity of its speakers.

The Portuguese discovered Cape Verde in the early 1500s and quickly established it as a colony for the "*ladinização*," or "Latinization" of African enslaved people, who were conditioned to intense labor and cultural indoctrination before being transported to the New World and other

overseas colonies. Because the Portuguese colonizers left their families at home, there were relatively few Portuguese women in the Cape Verde colony. As a result, Portuguese masters often fathered children with enslaved women. As Richard A. Lobban, author of *Cape Verde: Crioulo Colony*, notes, the bipolar system of “slavers and slaves lasted as little as nine months before it began to be ambiguous” (Lobban 54). By 1550, the mestizo population reached 69.61%, which outnumbered not only the Whites at 1.96% but the Blacks as well, at 28.38% (Lobban 55). In fact, the number of mestizo children grew so dramatically that in 1620 the monarchy gave the royal order to force the exile of Portuguese women convicts to Cape Verde in an effort to extinguish the mulatto race (55). However, the effort proved futile (Williams 21).

In contrast to countries such as South Africa and the United States, in which categories of race tend to be more sharply defined, the racial hierarchies in Cape Verde were much more complex (Lobban 56–57). The hybridity of the Cape Verdean people as a result of master/slave sexual relations allowed them to ambiguate and complicate the Manichean binary. As Homi Bhabha argues,

If the effect of colonial power is seen to be the production of hybridisation rather than the hegemonic command of colonial authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs. It reveals the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourse and enables a form of subversion founded on that uncertainty, that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention. (Bhabha 97)

However, the subversion of the colonial power through the ambivalence of hybridization occurred slowly and subtly in Cape Verde.

As early as 1546, the Portuguese allowed capable mulatto and even Black men to occupy administrative positions in the City Hall of Ribeira Grande, island of Santiago. However, it was not until the seventeenth century that the islands saw an increase in the participation of Blacks and mulattos in administrative positions. This was due in part to the miscegenation of the general population but also to a crisis in overseas trade, which forced many whites and their “legitimate” descendants to seek better opportunities in Europe. As a result, Blacks and mulattos were able to fill vacant public positions that would have otherwise been withheld from them. Whites also often left their lands to their illegitimate sons, which gave mulattos further opportunities for social ascendance (Rego 27). One of these illegitimate mulatto sons, Colonel Honorario Pereira Barreto (1813–1859), was the first Cape Verdean-born governor of Portuguese Guinea, indicating a strong Cape Verdean presence not only within the island nation but also on the African coast in the nineteenth century (Lobban 36). Colonel Barreto is an example of what would be known as a *lançado*, a hybrid ethnic category that

violated colonial law and mingled with the African natives, giving rise to the Cape Verdean version of the colonial system, in which the line between colonizer and colonized became increasingly blurred, slaves and slavers were often confounded, and the Portuguese language quickly gave way to Kriolu in everyday life. (Rego 35)

Thus, Kriolu emerged alongside the mulato and the *lançado* because, like both hybrid racial categories, Kriolu is a hybrid language that blurred the lines between the language of the colonizer (Portuguese) and that of the colonized (African tribal languages).

Not surprisingly, due to its ability to threaten the linguistic binary of colonizer and colonized, Kriolu was met with some hostility, not so much within the islands but from the Portuguese crown. Colonial inspector Lopes de Lima, in a report to Lisbon National Press in 1844 after an official visit to Cape Verde, was troubled by Kriolu and made the following statement:

The pure Portuguese Language... has been substituted by a mixed chatter of African terms and old Portuguese...; rapidly pronounced with guttural endings; without grammar or fixed rules; which they call *Lingua Creoula*... The same whites animate its use, learning the Creole as soon as they

arrive there from Europe... and teaching their children to speak it with virtual exclusion of clean Portuguese... It is a vice that can only be destroyed little by little, with the introduction of priests and schools of good Portuguese (Rego 40).

Lopes de Lima's assertion that Kriolu's "mixed chatter" was destroying the "pure" and "clean" Portuguese speaks to an endemic underlying racism and to the threat that both Kriolu and its mixed-race people posed to the Manichean binary that the Portuguese colonizers wanted to keep intact. That threat was, in fact, real since Kriolu would become an instrument in the hands of the Cape Verdean people to dismantle the binary in their struggle for independence from Portugal.

Kriolu Resistance

The founding of a Cape Verdean journal titled *Claridade* in 1936, by Cape Verdean writers Jorge Barbosa, Baltasar Lopes, and Manuel Lopes, was the first important step toward establishing a robust Cape Verdean identity through socially oriented writing that "pertained to local themes—droughts, colonial negligence, inequalities between 'black' and 'white,' and hunger—and that envisioned the birth of a new Cape Verdean ethnos" (Rego 43). The *Claridade* movement contributed important ideas to the liberation movement that would continue into the 1960s and ultimately lead to the birth of the Cape Verdean Republic in 1975.

Claridade writers used various strategies to strengthen a unique national identity. On the one hand, they attempted to come to terms with their enslaved past and colonized present by rejecting and criticizing their colonial oppressors; however, they had to do this carefully and subtly so as not to enrage the Portuguese officials. Secondly, they embraced Kriolu as a national and cultural language by writing and publishing poems in Kriolu for the first time. According to Rego, literary critics have noted that Cape Verdean poets often wrote evasion-themed poetry in Portuguese, while counter-evasion poetry, which often expressed a "painful longing for home," or *sodadi*, was often written in Kriolu. An example of an evasion-themed poem by *Claridade* writer Luís Romano is included below, an excerpt from a poem titled "White Brother":

Your dead seeds were unable to bloom

So you mixed my Black blood
into the dough of a land that you desired exclusively for yourself
You engaged the arms that I gave you—White Brother—
and extracted vast fortunes from the mud heaps where my eyes saw the light of day

Thus, day-by-day, you constructed as you destructed
the tomb of your dreams
hour by hour you inoculated in my veins
the bitter bile that you would have to drink

Now all that is left to you is the sea—look upon it—
In its immensity
—perhaps—

You have the vision of a symbol that you tore down: union (Williams 225).

Originally written in Portuguese, this evasion-themed poem expresses anger towards the "White Brother," the Portuguese colonizer. The poet acknowledges the greed of his oppressor, who "extracted vast fortunes" in an attempt to build an empire, the forced miscegenation, the mixing of "Black blood / into the dough of a land you desired exclusively for yourself," and the exploitation of the "engaged arms that I gave you." However, despite the anger and resentment, the poet does not entirely reject the Portuguese oppressor because he acknowledges the ethnic ties to his "white brother." Inevitably, the poet has white blood in him as well, so the mixing of races inextricably binds the two brothers. That said, even though he credits the colonizer for his own creation, the poet does not call the colonizer his "father" because that would place the two

of them in a vertical hierarchy, with the poet in a subordinate position. Instead, he uses the term “brother” to create a horizontal relationship where both brothers share the same status.

Furthermore, despite the oppression and pain the poet experienced at the hands of his white brother, he finds a source of strength in his suffering. The “inoculation” put into his veins, which is the “bitter bile” the white brother is forced to drink, refers to the hybridity of the Cape Verdean. The colonizer’s illegitimate mulatto children not only complicate the Manichean binary, but their very existence forces their white fathers to drink the “bitter bile” by confronting the Freudian mirror of the Self, exposing the ugliness of colonization. Bhabha calls this confrontation a crisis of the authority’s system of recognition, in which “colonial specularity, doubly inscribed, does not produce a mirror where the self apprehends itself; it is always the split screen of the self and its doubling, the hybrid” (Bhabha 175).

An example of counter-evasion poetry is the Kriolu poem “Morna de Despedida” (Morna of Parting), written by Eugenio Tavares. Versions in Kriolu, Portuguese, and English are provided below:

Se bem é doce,	Se reunir é doce,	If meetings are sweet,
Bai é maguado;	Partir é magoa;	Then partings are sour;
Mas, se ca bado,	Mas, se não partir,	But, if one won’t leave,
Ca ta birado!	Não terá de voltar!	There’s no return hour!
Se no more	E se morremos	And if we should die
Na despedida,	Na despedida,	As we now depart,
Nhor Des na volta	O nosso Deus na volta	Then in God’s return
Ta dano bida.	Nos dará vida.	He’ll grant life and heart.

(Williams 186)

Morna is the most popular Cape Verdean genre of music and poetry that expresses longing and nostalgia for loved ones and home. In “Morna de Despedida,” the poet must part from his beloved, and though “partings are sour,” he knows that there must be a “return hour” when the lovers reunite. Though not explicitly stated, the return is not only to a loved one but to the poet’s beloved island home. The fact that this *morna* is written in Kriolu adds an extra dimension of *sodadi*, since Kriolu is a language of Cape Verdean pride that roots the speaker to the soil of the Archipelago. It also infuses the poem with a musicality that the Portuguese and English versions do not have. For example, there is more rhyme, with *maguado/bado/birado* and *despedida/volta/bida*. Also, Kriolu collapses pronouns and articles into one, such as “O nosso” into “Nhor,” and shortens words, such as “bai” instead of “partir” or “more” instead of “morremos,” which allows the Kriolu version a more consistent syllabic structure of four or five iambic syllables. As a result, the Kriolu poem sounds more like a song that can be performed off the page because Kriolu is primarily a spoken or sung language instead of a written one. Though the poem does not express overt anti-colonialist themes, the use of Kriolu and the *morna* tradition subtly establishes a sense of nationalism and cultural pride.

In the 1950s, a few decades after the *Claridade* movement began, revolutionary-minded intellectuals who thought of themselves as Africans formed groups to fight for independence from Portugal. They formed the PAIGC (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde) in 1956, with Cape Verdean-Guinean Amílcar Cabral³ as president (Williams 27). When Kriolu became a target of the Portuguese government and was banned from school grounds in 1959, Cabral and others adopted the hybrid language as a banner for the nationalist movement (Rego 45). In his famous speech to the PAIGC, Cabral argued that “if imperialist domination has the vital need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of culture” (Lobban 61). Kriolu, then, became a tool for strategic essentialism since “The recuperation of the *badiu* ‘soul,’ or Cape Verde’s ‘African roots,’ was an important part of the PAIGC’s... campaign against colonial forces and their repression of Cape Verdean culture” (Rego 147). It

was incredibly effective as a source of political power, as “Cape Verdeanity,” which included Kriolu, “was counterposed to Portuguese culture as a means of asserting self-determination and achieving national liberation” (Lobban 146).

After fighting in the jungles of Guinea-Bissau, revolutionists finally won independence, which was declared from the Sheraton Hotel in Boston on February 23, 1975. On July 5, Cape Verde became officially recognized as independent from Portugal and joined Guinea-Bissau as a two-state country, which was later disbanded in 1981 (Williams 29). Despite the success of the liberation movement, however, the question of cultural identity remained, as Cape Verdeans were faced with the decision to identify as European or African. The hybrid culture, race, and language of the Cape Verdean people made this extremely difficult.

Postcolonial Debate: African or European?

Fanon, writing about the Algerian War of Independence from France in the 1950s and early 1960s in his seminal work *The Wretched of the Earth*, underscores a similar crisis of identity experienced by the Cape Verdean people after achieving independence:

African unity, a vague term, but nevertheless one to which the men and women of Africa were passionately attached and whose operative function was to put incredible pressure on colonialism, reveals its true face and crumbles into regionalisms within the same national reality. Because it is obsessed with its immediate interests, because it cannot see further than the end of its nose, the national bourgeoisie proves incapable of achieving simple national unity and incapable of building the nation on a solid, constructive foundation. The national front that drove back colonialism falls apart and licks its wounds. (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 106)

As Fanon suggests, the vagueness of “Africa” is not concrete enough to build a united culture. Although Cape Verdeans used Kriolu and emphasized their Africanness to distance themselves from the Europeaness of the Portuguese, they did not actually see themselves as purely African either. However, instead of coming to terms with the hybridity of their history and language, the postcolonial era in Cape Verde is reflected by a bipolar debate between Africanness and Europeaness.

A telling example of Cape Verde's struggle to define itself as either African or European in the postcolonial era is the debate surrounding the national flag. The first Cape Verdean flag was created in 1975 by the PAIGC, the reigning political party, immediately following independence, and it clearly emphasized Cape Verde's African roots (see Figure 1). Its primary colors were green, red, and yellow, colors often associated with African vexillology. In addition, its emblem included corn hobs, a decidedly African image. In the early 1990s, an opposing political party, the MpD (Movement for Democracy), rejected the “symbolic ties to an impoverished and undemocratic Africa” (Lobban 148) and instead incorporated primary colors of red, white, and blue, with stripes along the center and ten stars representing the ten islands (see Figure 2).



Fig 1. The Cape Verde Flag, 1975–1992.
Retrieved from www.fotw.info/flags/cv_1975.html.



Fig 2. The Cape Verde Flag, 1992 – present.
Retrieved from Wikipedia (Flag of Cape Verde)

Although the debate surrounding the Cape Verdean national flag appears to have been settled, the debate around the officialization of Kriolu continues until this day and reflects the same underlying tensions of racial identity between European and African roots.

In the constitutional revision of 1999, the debate over the officialization of Kriolu was divided among party lines. The center-right MpD party proposed that the government work towards the eventual officialization of Kriolu, while the opposing center-left political party, the PAICV (African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde), advocated for its immediate officialization, without any “hierarchical subalternation” to Portuguese (Rego 53). Ultimately, the MpD prevailed. The current constitutional amendment reads:

1. The official language is Portuguese.
2. The State promotes the conditions for the officialization of the Cape Verdean mother tongue, in parity with the Portuguese language. (Rego 53)

As this linguistic amendment shows, the tensions between both languages continue to erupt in various points of conflict, creating a dual personality within Cape Verdean linguistic identity.

Dual Linguistic Identity

It is important here to distinguish the differences between Kriolu and Portuguese in order to show how a dual linguistic identity emerges from the tension between both languages. Marcia Rego explains the difference between the two when she writes,

On one hand, Kriolu, inalienable from the language of the colonizer, is held to be their ‘own,’ the only way to convey what it really means to be caboverdiano. On the other hand, Portuguese is the language of a literary and political elite who effectively imagined the nation and declared it independent. (Rego 48).

Gabriel Mariano, a Cape Verdean writer, characterizes the differences in less formal terms: “Portuguese is the language of solemn moments, of saloons and cutaway coats, Kriolu is the language of the day-to-day, and of the kitchen, and the language one uses while in short-sleeved shirts” (Rego 85). Due to the divide between the use of both languages, deciding whether to use Portuguese or Kriolu in various social settings is a complicated political decision. A Cape Verdean from Praia named José Antonio recounts this difficulty in the workplace:

Nowadays, it’s much more common to speak Kriolu at work, even in state institutions. But there are some implicit rules, you know. If you speak to someone in Kriolu, you’re putting yourself in a place of equal status... You may have a college education and the other person might be illiterate, you know; if you speak Kriolu you are equal. So, you usually don’t speak Kriolu to your boss unless you are close, or unless he talks to you in Kriolu first. Now, if you want to introduce a barrier, then you speak in Portuguese... Automatically, it creates a barrier. (Rego 90)

The fact that Portuguese creates a “barrier” indicates that the vertical hierarchy between the colonizer and the colonized persists, even today, within the linguistic hierarchy of Portuguese and Kriolu. Despite the hybridity of the Cape Verdean people both ethnically and linguistically, the language of the colonizer, which is still the official language of the island nation, allows a Manichean binary to exist on a subtle yet pervasive level. This results in a continued crisis of identity, where Cape Verdeans are forced to choose to identify as African or European depending on the social situation and the political advantage (or disadvantage) of either marker.

The case of names sheds further light on this identity crisis. In Cape Verde, most everyone has a *nome de igreja* (church name) and a *nome de casa* (house name), sometimes called a *nominho* (nickname). The *nomes de igreja* are almost always in Portuguese (some examples include Maria dos Santos, Jose Ramos, Manuel Ferreira, and Carla Lopes), while the *nomes de casa* are always in Kriolu (some examples include Djon-Djon, Titi, and Zê). Cape Verdeans rarely call each other

by their *nomes de igreja* unless they operate in an official capacity at church or a government institution. A newspaper obituary further demonstrates this dual identity of names: “Nhonho, Tchico, Guguta, Da, Djosa, and Cocola invite the friends and family of Francisco Gomes Mendes, who was better known as Tatai, to the mass in his honor, on the third month of his death, to be celebrated in the Chapel of...” (Rego 103). Because death is an official and important event, the *nome de igreja* of the deceased man is used in the newspaper; however, because none of his friends and family knew him by his *nome de igreja*, the obituary lists his *nome de casa* as well as those of his family members.

Perhaps the most destructive result of the tension between Portuguese and Kriolu is the racist hierarchy that persists even between Kriolu dialects. There are two main Kriolu dialects, Sotavento and Barlavento. Sotavento is the dialect of the southern islands and is most widely spoken. It is also considered the “original” Kriolu because other dialects are derived from it. Speakers of Sotavento Kriolu criticize the lighter-skinned *sampadjudos*, the speakers of the northern Barlavento dialect, for thinking their dialect is superior because it is closer to Portuguese. The *sampadjudos*, on the other hand, disparage the *badius* for speaking an African Kriolu. In both cases, the tension is based on racial discrimination, where one group derides the other for attempting to be more European, while the second group mocks the other for being too African (Rego 57).

The bipolar identity crisis between European and African influences permeates all levels of Cape Verdean linguistic culture: the political choice of speaking Portuguese or Kriolu, the use of *nomes de igreja* and *nomes de casa*, and even the Kriolu dialects themselves. The result is no doubt a structure of racial and cultural discrimination inherited from colonial indoctrination.

Hybrid Kriolu Culture

Although there is no easy solution to the cultural and linguistic identity crisis Cape Verdeans currently experience, the more Cape Verdeans acknowledge the hybridity of their culture, the less a vertical colonial hierarchy will be allowed to pervade all levels of Cape Verde's complex linguistic structure. Although Cape Verdeans are often forced to choose between speaking and writing in Portuguese or Kriolu for various political reasons, even the relationship between the two languages is not necessarily binary in nature.

Marcia Rego points out that Kriolu and Portuguese are not “discrete codes” that Cape Verdeans can easily switch in and out of, but two intertwining and entangled languages that together represent the hybrid and complex history of Cape Verdean culture. Both languages feed off each other in complicated ways (Rego 1). Where “One speaks a Portuguese disturbed by, contested by, rescued by, and completed by Kriolu,” they may also speak a “Kriolu that is haunted, moderated, or instigated by Portuguese...” This nuanced linguistic interplay is a legacy of Cape Verde's role in the slave economy, of the intimate exchanges that sidestepped the colonial discourse and the hierarchies they engendered” (1). Is there, then, to paraphrase the question Josias Tembo poses in *African Identity*, another way of conceptualizing Cape Verdean identity that does not fall back into “polarities of essentialism and anti-essentialism?” (Tembo 20).

Tembo outlines the theoretical foundations of African identity, which he argues all fall short of reconstructing an African identity without defining it merely in opposition to Eurocentrism. The first view is the particularist trend, “which informs the essentialist view on African identity” (Tembo 19). The second is the universalist trend, which “informs the anti-essentialist view” (19). The last of the three dominant theories of African identity is “the African hermeneutical trend, which takes the middle ground between the particularist and the universalist trends” (20). Tembo's critique of these postcolonialist theories is that they take “for granted that identities are fluid, that subjects are constructed through competing discourses, and that cultures are never homogenous” (43). Borrowing from the work of David Scott, Tembo adds a fourth view,

which “calls for a critical and comprehensive understanding of the present,” for “To come to such an understanding of the present, an engagement with the past is imperative” (45).

By adopting Tembo’s fourth view of African identity as a historically constructed and fluid identity comprising competing discourses, we will come to a better understanding of the Cape Verdean culture of the present. The dual personality crisis that revolves around a bipolar debate between Africanness and Europeanness will also be eased because Cape Verdeans are both African and European. Kalua observes that for “many people, a true and pure African identity is not only possible but realizable, even in today’s globalized and globalizing world,” but “invoking the term ‘Africa’ suggests a fixity of identity or cultural unity, and yet the underlying motif remains the opposite: the shifting nature of African identity” (25–26). A constructivist approach to Cape Verdean identity—in contrast to the deconstructive approaches of essentialism or anti-essentialism—acknowledges this fluidity in the ever-changing globalization of the present. Cape Verdeans are not defined solely by geography, as more Cape Verdeans now live outside of the country than in it (Lobban et al.), but by their shared language, which has always been a hybrid “forked tongue.” But this does not mean that Cape Verdeans are powerless or dominated by their colonial past. Despite Fanon’s claim that “colonised persons who speak the language of the coloniser are ipso facto assuming the latter’s culture” and are summarily dominated by it (quoted in Montle 96), Kriolu’s hybridity allows for liberation and subversion of the colonial tongue of Portuguese. An example of this is the Creole rap culture in Portugal. Through his ethnographic fieldwork in Portugal, Derek Pardue uncovered a unique Cape Verdean language identity and began to see the “story of Kriolu... as a Creole interruption and thus, a contingent break from the mimesis of Portugal’s ‘soft’ power of inclusion” (Pardue 2). In addition, Kriolu has recently received recognition as a legitimate language with the publication of Manuel Da Luz Goncalves’ *Mili Mila*, the first Cape Verdean Creole-English dictionary (Miller), and the US publication of the first children’s book in Kriolu, *Tiagu y Vovo*, by Djofa Tavares (Daniel). More work needs to be done, but Kriolu is finally becoming accepted as a language in its own right, and more importantly, it has emerged as the predominant way of expressing Cape Verdean identity in an increasingly globalized age.

The following poem by Jorge Barbosa, one of the founders of the *Claridade* movement, is an origin myth titled “Prelude.” Similar to the myth at the beginning of this essay, the poem attempts to come to terms with Cape Verde’s complicated pre-colonial past. However, Barbosa does not endeavor to *recover* a pre-colonial African or European past. Instead, he gives us the historical reality of Cape Verde’s true origins:

When the discoverer arrived at the first island
neither naked men
nor naked women
were peeking out
in innocence and fear
behind the vegetation.

Nor were there poison arrows flying through the air
nor shouts of alarm and War
echoing through the hills.

There were only birds of prey
With sharp talons
sea birds
Of extended flights
and song birds
Whistling their never before heard melodies.

And the vegetation whose seeds arrived stuck
to the wings of birds
swept this way
by the fury of the storms.

When the discoverer arrived
and jumped out of the longboat beached on the shore
sinking
his right foot into the wet sand

And making the sign of the cross
still unsure and somewhat surprised
and acting on behalf of his King
well it was at that moment
that very first moment
when this our destiny which
belongs to us all began to be fulfilled. (Williams 277)

As Barbosa beautifully illustrates, the “destiny” that belongs to all Cape Verdeans began when the first Portuguese colonizer set foot on Cape Verde’s soil. The islands were completely uninhabited, so “neither naked men / nor naked women / were peeking out / in innocence and fear / behind the vegetation.” Therefore, there is no hope of recovering a pre-colonial past because Cape Verde does not have one: its past is inseparably entangled, for better or worse, with Portuguese colonialism. However, as Cape Verde’s hybrid ethnic and linguistic identity became a powerful political tool throughout its history, perhaps Cape Verde can once again embrace the tension that gave rise to the complexity of its hybrid Kriolu identity: a culture that is not solely African or European, but uniquely Cape Verdean.

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Notes

- ¹ Derek Pardue explains that there are two spellings of this word, marking a “general break between the Creole spoken in the northern ring of islands called the *barlavento*, or windward islands (Crioulo), and the southern, *sotavento*, or leeward islands (Kriolu)” (9). For simplicity, I use “Kriolu” throughout this article to refer to both Creoles spoken in Cape Verde.
- ² “The overwhelming majority of the population of Cabo Verde is of mixed European and African descent and is often referred to as *mestiço* or Crioulo. There is also an African minority, which includes the Fulani (Fulbe), the Balante, and the Mandyako peoples. A small population of European origin includes those of Portuguese descent (especially from the Algarve, a historical province, and the Azores islands), as well as those of Italian, French, and English descent. There is also a substantial number that traces its roots to Sephardic Jews who were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in the 15th and 16th centuries during the Inquisition and were among the islands’ early settlers, or to other groups of Jews—mainly tradesmen—who arrived in the 19th century from Morocco” (Lobban et al.).
- ³ Comparing Cabral’s often violent and militaristic speeches to the similar rhetoric of Franz Fanon, Edward Said argued for a wider and more generous view of both anti-colonial leaders: “It is hard to miss in Amílcar Cabral’s remarkable speeches and tracts the extraordinary intensity of the man’s mobilizing force, his animosity and violence, the way resentment and hate keep turning up—all the more evident against the particularly ugly backdrop of Portuguese colonialism. Yet one would seriously misread him if one missed Cabral’s enabling utopianism and theoretical generosity, just as it is a misreading of Fanon not to see in him something considerably beyond a celebration of violent conflict. For both Cabral and Fanon, the emphasis on armed struggle is tactical” (Said 275).

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Genealogies of Vital Force: ‘Ntu,’ ‘Àsẹ,’ and Conceptual Lines of Descent

ANGELA ROOTHAAN & SAHEED ADESUMBO BELLO

Abstract: This paper relates the philosophical concept of ‘vital force,’ translated and globalized from the book *Bantu Philosophy* by Belgian missionary Placide Tempels, to the Bantu and Yorùbá concepts of *ntu* and *àsẹ* as conceptual ancestors, arguing that (i) although Tempels in his book did not claim anything other than to understand the philosophy of Bantu peoples, (ii) intercultural connections/crossovers with the philosophy of other African peoples can still be established. Thus, we respond to debates around the concept’s generalizing potential and colonial burden, showing lines of conceptual descent in which living structures of meaning become interconnected with abstracted translations.

Keywords: *àsẹ*, Bantu, decolonization, *ntu*, vital force, Yorùbá

Introduction

The concept of ‘vital force’ has been much discussed in connection with the book *Bantu Philosophy* by Belgian missionary Placide Tempels. It was hailed, for instance, as the source of the *négritude* movement¹ and criticized as an instrument of colonial power to maintain African subjects focused on spirituality rather than their rights.² In 1988, Congolese philosopher Valentin Mudimbe declared these varied debates to belong to the past.³ If he is correct, we think it is now appropriate to revisit the concept of vital force as a genuine point of reference in African systems of philosophical knowledge.

As case studies, we will trace the indigenous (Bantu and Yorùbá)⁴ concepts of *ntu* and *àsẹ* as conceptual ancestors of the globalized philosophical concept of ‘vital force.’ Being a conceptual ancestor does not refer to historical etymological causality but to being perceived as a primordial concept that still influences present-day meaning transfer or creation. We will argue that (i) although Tempels in his book did not claim anything other than to understand the philosophy of Bantu peoples, (ii) intercultural connections/crossovers with the philosophy of other African peoples can still be established. For this reason, we choose the concepts of *ntu* and *àsẹ* to underline the similarities and differences between Bantu philosophy and Yorùbá philosophy, and we will trace how they can be seen as conceptual ancestors, inspiring the globalized concept of vital force. We take our return to the colonial heritage to be post-postcolonial as we move beyond the postcolonial reactions to Tempels’ conceptual find while we investigate how it is part of today’s African heritage. Our tracing will show the lines of conceptual descent in which pre-colonial structures of meaning have become interconnected with present-day translations.⁵

In the first section, we will focus on the concept of vital force, as it was formed through the different translations of the original Dutch study by Placide Tempels, who used several Dutch concepts, namely *levenskracht*, *levensterkte*, and *sterkte*. Through them, he obviously translated a concept already present in the Bantu languages he knew, especially in Luba Shakandi.⁶ Al-

though Rwandese scholar and Tempels' contemporary, Alexis Kagame, identified *ntu*—the root that is also present in concepts such as *ubuntu*, *Muntu*, and, of course, *Bantu*—to mean 'being,' later and present-day authors seem unified in their conclusion that *ntu* identifies with the Tempelsian concept of *life strength* or *vital force*.⁷

In the second section, we will briefly present the debates around the concept of vital force that were inspired by *Bantu Philosophy* and will track how these were influenced by the changing political force field in which, from the 1950s until the 1980s, African(a) scholars were working to regain epistemic independence after colonial oppression. Our aim in this section is to show how the philosophical hermeneutics of concepts changes through and with historical conditions. As a result, we should be aware that we can never reclaim a pure, pre-colonial African philosophy nor claim a definite causality of meaning-transfer from pre-colonial concepts to current ones. Moreover, unlike the imagination of colonial ethnographical work that projected African cultures as timeless, we will not follow the European Enlightenment philosopher Hegel, who denied Africans any conscious reflected connection to global history. We will rather project present-day African philosophical discussions on *ntu*, Bantu philosophy, and vital force as a globalizing African concept, as live traditions that refer to *ntu* as an ancestor concept.

The third section moves to the Yorùbá concept of *àṣẹ*, which, like *ntu*, has been translated as "vital force" (possessed by living and non-living organisms) by Margaret Thompson Drewal,⁸ Moses A. Makinde,⁹ Andrew Apter,¹⁰ and Rowland Abiodun.¹¹ Deploying colonial and/or post-colonial approaches to the explorations of this concept, these anthropologists and/or Africanists discussed the manifestations of *àṣẹ* through verbal and visual arts in ritual contexts. Moving beyond the ritual contexts, we focus on *àṣẹ* as the ancestor concept of the Yorùbá philosophical tradition, thus relating it to the ongoing postcolonial debates in African philosophy.

In our (brief) conclusion, we will return from the case studies to the meta-discussion of the current statuses of African philosophy and African philosophies, as we are gaining more knowledge about the importance of language for humanity—notably regarding the understanding and adaptation to their lifeworld—whether in its oral or written form. We will also answer our main question as to how the concept of vital force can enter the globalizing philosophical discussion concerning humanity's place in reality while retaining and remembering concepts expressed in different African languages as conceptual ancestors through and beyond histories of colonialism and decolonization. We propose to understand these concepts as non-colonial, which means they are not completely determined by their encounters with Western dominating powers or by the African struggle for liberation. Instead, they express autonomous and continuous ways in which African people relate to the world.

Tracing 'Vital Force' through Its Translations

The concept of vital force, as used in African philosophy today, originates from the different translations of an original Dutch study by Placide Tempels. Tempels' original Dutch words, *levenskracht*, *levenssterkte*, and *sterkte*, were translated into French as *force vitale*, which in English became *vital force*. Taken literally, the Dutch concepts that render a Baluba understanding translate more truthfully as *vitality*, *strength of life*, or *life energy*. Since concepts are open transferrers of meaning that may take on different aspects, not only through time but also and especially through translation, we think that the translations of 'strength of life' or 'life' to '*force vitale*' into French and the later English 'vital force' add elements of modern techno-scientific and industrial understanding of the world that are absent in the original concepts. In European languages, the concept of *force* has become strongly associated with 'natural forces' as understood through the natural sciences' identification of natural laws as descriptors of ontology. Elements of spiritual and social understanding of life that are predominant in Tempels' characterization of the Bantu ontology tend to be relegated to secondary importance.

Another translation issue happens in the influential work of the Rwandese scholar Alexis Kagame, who, in his *La philosophie bântu-rwandaise de l'Être*, identifies the basic philosophical categories in his own Bantu language (Kinyarwanda) as forms comprising *ntu*: those are *ikîntu* (the force/being that is foundational of material phenomena), *umuntu* (the force/being that is foundational of intelligence), *ahantu* (*idem* for movement) and *ukuntu* (*idem* for modality). Linguistically, we should be aware that *ntu* is no independent concept in itself; it is an indissoluble root, present in even more concepts than the above, such as *ubuntu* and *bantu* (plural of *muntu*).¹² It has been remarked and critiqued that Kagame relies heavily on the Aristotelian system of categories in philosophy, indicating foundational concepts of reality as well as our understanding of it. He disagrees with Tempels' thesis that Bantu Ontology can be opposed to European Ontology. Being, according to Kagame, is similarly central in all philosophies around the world, while it is differently classified based on different languages (Masolo 449).

Senghor, already mentioned as one of the founders of the *négritude* movement, took a position towards *Bantu Philosophy* quite different from Kagame's. While writing on African arts and culture, he interpreted vital force as the sub-reality driving African artistic expressions, as well as the wisdom telling of African sages. He even held such a view before reading *Bantu Philosophy*, and Tempels' work confirmed his understanding. In the words of Diagne (83):

[Senghor] speaks of an 'ordering force' which is 'the vital element par excellence', thus inviting us to think of sculpture and ontology together. The discovery of Tempels' work [...] allows him thereafter to be more precise [...]: the reality of vital forces, which, he says, constitute the fabric of reality.

Thus, we see the concept of vital force being adopted and re-interpreted by various African philosophers as part of their living philosophical tradition. In Senghor's case, the idea that being is force in African ontology is central, and he sees this force primarily expressed in African forms of art and sagacity.

Before we discuss the debates about vital force among African philosophers in the next section, a few words on the literal translations of the book are in place. *Bantu Philosophy* would never have been written were it not for Émile Possoz, a Belgian colonial magistrate, who stimulated Tempels to write the book.¹³ Possoz was a radical pro-African writer who saw potential in Tempels' attempt to Africanize Christian missionary work and pushed him to express in a systematic study what the philosophical foundation would be of the African understanding to which he wanted to adapt his catechism. After Tempels first published the work in separate chapters in Congolese colonial journals, Possoz immediately started translating them into French. When the colonial publishing house Lovania published the book in 1945 for the Congo, Possoz's version was considered unreadable: too literal and radically pro-African. *Présence Africaine*, which published a corrected version of the 1945 edition in 1949, followed this view as well as the choice for another translator, Antoine Rubbens. While publishers Léopold Sédar Senghor and Alioune Diop both hailed *Bantu Philosophy* as a philosophical foundation for their *négritude* movement that celebrated global Black culture, they preferred the more 'moderate' translation. Rubbens, however, seems to have adapted the text to colonial sensibilities that were still dictating European publishing culture, leaving generations of francophone readers with a book that is racist and colonial in ways the Dutch original never was.¹⁴ Since the later English translation (by King, 1959) is based upon the French rendition of 1949, the same tone and mis-translations persist in that edition.

When we look at just one case, we notice the voice of one of Tempels' African colleagues and discussion partners being completely erased when the text is first mistranslated into French and then even more into English. The French version reads: "*Un indigène expliquait à un confrère: 'Ce muntu, c'est plutôt ce que vous désignez en français par 'la personne' et non ce que vous exprimez par 'l'homme'.*"—describing how an indigenous person explained to a fellow monastic brother how

the concept *muntu* should be translated as person rather than as human being. In Dutch, however, the indigenous person is presented as someone with university training who is not talking to a fellow brother but to Tempels himself: “*Een gestudeerde Zwarte zei me eens...*,” meaning “A university-trained Black person said to me once...” In English, the mistranslation is repeated and arguably worsened when King transforms the “university-trained Black person” into a “Bantu.”¹⁵ From the perspective of epistemic ownership and agency, two disastrous changes happen here: first, the Bantu language expert loses their university degree, and second, they are no longer talking to Tempels himself. This results in the erasure of the *dialogical exchange* whereby a knowledgeable practitioner of Bantu language and mores informs the writer of *Bantu Philosophy* who tries to capture this knowledge for European readers.

It is clear that Kagame’s and Tempels’ early articulations of a Bantu philosophy foreshadow later debates on African philosophy. Some authors contend that African ways of understanding reality, including Bantu philosophies, are characterized by a focus on dynamism that articulates the everyday African understanding present in wisdom traditions, social customs, rituals, religions, and all forms of artful rendering of that understanding. Among them are thinkers such as Senghor and Mbiti¹⁶ and many present-day philosophers who aim to articulate what African philosophy can bring to the global stage as its own. Against them, other authors, such as Hountondji, Towa, and Eboussi Boulaga, underline the universal nature of philosophy and its rational and scriptural approach. While disagreeing in many aspects of their critique, these authors converge in their general accusation that *Bantu Philosophy* is no real philosophical work but, in fact, an ethnological study of philosophy, a form of ethnophilosophy.

Vital Force Contested, Grounded, and Globalized

In an atmosphere of approaching decolonization, it is understandable that those who wanted to keep the Belgian establishment in Congo in power were scrutinizing Tempels closely and even got him removed for several years from the colony. According to some sources, he was penalized for radicalizing the “traditional missionary ideal which postulated the absolute superiority of Western Christianity and actively supported the established colonial order” (Clement 243). On the other side, he was also rejected by leading thinkers of decolonization, such as Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, for being too soft on the colonial enterprise and uncaring for the bondage and poverty of the indigenous people. In his essay *Discourse on Colonialism*, Césaire, one of the classic postcolonial theorists, indicted Western civilization for having produced colonization, with the famous words that “[...] out of all the colonial expeditions that have been undertaken, out of all the colonial statutes that have been drawn up, out of all the memoranda that have been dispatched by all the ministries, there could not come a single human value” (Césaire 34). In this criticism, Césaire includes Tempels. Despite his expressed sympathy for Africans, the missionary failed to speak out against the cruelties of colonialism in Congo. Césaire even accuses Tempels of implicitly supporting this situation by focusing the attention of the ‘good colonials’ on philosophy: “Wonderful! Everybody gains: the big companies, the colonists, the government – everybody except the Bantu, naturally. Since Bantu thought is ontological, the Bantu only ask for satisfaction of an ontological nature” (58).

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon analyzes in a similar manner how interest in an African ontology of forces is a dead end as long as apartheid exists. He criticizes Tempels’ *Bantu Philosophy* in itself not so much but Alioune Diop’s enthusiasm to build the cultural *négritude* movement on it and other works on traditional African cultures. He judges any backward-looking cultural enthusiasm to be obsolete. For him, “In no way should I dedicate myself to the revival of an unjustly unrecognized Negro civilization. I will not make myself the man of any past. I do not want to exalt the past at the expense of my present and of my future” (Fanon 176). One can read this as saying: I am interested in my life as a real existence to be projected

into the future; I have no interest in a philosophical reflection on my life as an expression of vital force. Of course, one does not have to think that reflecting on ancestor concepts makes one stick in the past, but Fanon obviously does think that way.

A different type of criticism, but leaning on the ones mentioned, was put forward by Paulin Hountondji. He rejects Tempels' *Bantu philosophy* for being a work of ethnophilosophy, describing a 'Bantu' philosophy as the foundational ontological structure of a communal life-world. After colonialism, however, we have to see, according to Hountondji, that philosophy is a critical reflection and not a communal enterprise. Hountondji contends that "philosophy, a critical reflection *par excellence*, cannot develop fully unless it 'writes its memoirs' or 'keeps a diary.'" (Hountondji 105). For Hountondji, philosophy exists only in written tradition, and "African philosophy can exist only in the same mode as European philosophy, i.e. through what is called *literature*" (101. Original emphasis). Thus, Hountondji apparently denies the philosophical value of oral knowledge systems, as they were still vibrant in large parts of the African continent not long before he expressed his thoughts on African philosophy.

It should be noted that the decades-long debate around *Bantu Philosophy* by African(a) philosophers was, in reality, a debate with only one aim: to decolonize African Philosophy by reflecting on its nature. In fact, there is no work that discusses the nature of African philosophy and does not, at some point, mention Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, or vital force. Next to Hountondji and other critics of ethnophilosophy, who are mostly critical because of methodological concerns (ethnophilosophy not being *reflective* philosophy), there are also African philosophers of note who have taken up the ontology of vital force in more positive ways and discussed it substantially. Among them is Innocent Asouzu, who holds that Tempels is closer to Kagame than he would admit. While determining 'vital force' as being, Tempels remains bound, according to Asouzu, to the static orientation of Aristotelian philosophy:

If the notion of being can be reduced to such a fixed idea as force, it then means that it is a static immovable idea. In this case, we are dealing with a static Bantu ontology and not with a dynamic one. This force is nothing other than Aristotle's being as being, which is static in its abstractness. (Asouzu 183)

In fact, by proposing his *Ibunya* philosophy as an alternative understanding of African ontology, Asouzu provides a solution to Fanon's problem that the projection towards the future is more important than understanding tradition. This philosophy, referring to the insight that 'nothing is unsurmountable for ants,' points towards the complementary nature of human beings and their inherent dynamic relationality as foundational instead of pointing to being, namely a static category.¹⁷

Most famous, perhaps, are the interpretations of another Bantu language concept by South African philosopher Mogobe Ramose. Ramose reflects once again on the static-dynamic question of Bantu understanding of reality. In his description of *ubu* and *ntu* as an interconnection of ontology and epistemology, he comes close to what has been called 'process' philosophy¹⁸ or to the understanding of 'being and time' in their intimate entanglement. However, Ramose keeps his understanding on a meta-level, when, speaking of *ubu* and *ntu*, he declares that:

[...] they are mutually founding in the sense that they are two aspects of be-ing as a one-ness and an indivisible whole-ness. [...] On this reasoning, *ubu* may be regarded as be-ing becoming and this evidently implies the idea of motion. [...] – *ntu* may be construed as the temporarily having become. (Ramose 36)

We may conclude, therefore, that through the interpretations of vital force by African(a) philosophers, we see the continuous development of a philosophy that takes *ntu* as the ancestor concept of vital force. The reflections of Ramose, Asouzu, and the younger generation philosopher Ogbonnaya go beyond the decolonizing age of African philosophy that motivated the

reactions of the earlier generation. The discussion now has moved towards an open dialogue, as part of a non-colonial living tradition on ways to think and conceptualize the apparently African understanding of reality and humanity as being dynamic, complementing, relational, and becoming. Thus, *ntu* has become a post-postcolonial and non-colonial concept that, as a projected ancestor-concept, links several related interpretations through time.

Yorùbá Conception of Àṣẹ — Vital Force?

This section is based on popular verbal arts in ritual contexts, discussed hereunder. It is through these arts of/about being and becoming that we focus on *àṣẹ* as the metaphysical basis for present-day Yorùbá philosophy. It is believed that with the verbal and narrative arts, one can activate, command, or manipulate *àṣẹ*, that is, the power, energy, force/vitality of being and becoming in all beings.¹⁹ Whereas verbal art (which colonial writers called ‘incantation’) is contextually ritualistic, we take our interpretation beyond the ritual contexts through the story of/about being and becoming in *Ifá* (the Yorùbá divination and knowledge system). One expression of such verbal art goes thus:

Àṣẹ iná ni iná fi òjó; àṣẹ dòrùn ni dòrùn fí ùràn; àbá tí aláḡemọ bádá ni Òṣà òkè ùgbà... it is the force of fire that causes the fire to ignite; it is the force of sun that causes the sun to shine brightly; it is what an *aláḡemọ* (a green insect that can dance at will on the leaves), proposes, or requests for, that is granted by Olódùmarè the supreme being. To say that whatever an *aláḡemọ* prays for or proposes shall be granted by the supreme being is to maintain that Olódùmarè is the supreme source of *àṣẹ*.

The Yorùbá prayer foregrounds that *àṣẹ* is the power or vital force through which a being can interact with and command reverence from other beings. More specifically, the prayer for the Yorùbá foregrounds the knowledge of dynamic forces of command/authority in human beings and Òrìṣà, the Yorùbá pantheon. In Yorùbá society *àṣẹ* was understood to be at work when “the creation of the multiple godheads began a transference of social functions, the division of labour and professions among deities whose departments they were thereafter to become” (Soyinka 28). Thus, the dynamic forces of *àṣẹ* permitted Ọbàtálá to nurture his philosophical knowledge through which he became the first Yorùbá sculptural artist, god of creation and morality. Similarly, Ọgún the artist, the hunter and blacksmith, became the first acting man, the pathfinder, and the Yorùbá god of creativity through his *ìjálá* the choric art of Ọgún as well as the invention of gun, cutlass, hoe, and other farm implements. Abiodun (310) aptly explains that “*àṣẹ* pertains to the identification, activation and utilization of the innate energy, power and natural laws believed to reside in all animals, plants, hills, rivers, natural phenomena, human beings and Òrìṣà.” It is therefore salient that the conceptual genealogy of *àṣẹ* is rooted in the Yorùbá knowledge of the natural.

For the Yorùbá, one is born with *àṣẹ* to interact with and/or issue commands over oneself. As the power/force to interact with and command reverence from other beings, *àṣẹ* is developed, nurtured, and activated through personal/life experiences and the ontological journey of Yorùbá ritual and cosmology. Otherwise, the source of one’s *àṣẹ* will be questioned. As Abiodun (311) explains, “It is, therefore, not uncommon to hear a question like, ‘*Tani ó fun ọ ní àṣẹ*’. ‘What/who is your sanctioning authority (for an action)?’ when the source of an *àṣẹ* is suspect. Even an Òrìṣà’s *àṣẹ* can be queried.” Of course, like the natural *àṣẹ*, the supernatural *àṣẹ* of òrìṣà can also be nurtured/developed and activated through the similar ontological journey of Yorùbá ritual and cosmology. It is believed that *Ifá* always provides spiritual guidance/advice in that ontological journey. However, *Ifá*’s *àṣẹ*, as the power to provide spiritual guidance/advice, was also nurtured and activated through the personal/life experience and ontological journey of Ọrúnmìlà, the founder of the *Ifá* school, who radicalized the Yorùbá divination system and/or knowledge system.

Another oracular story—told by Babaláwo Ọ̀sitọ̀la to Margaret Drewal—helps to understand how Ọ̀rúnmilà nurtured and activated the spiritual *àṣẹ* of Ifá. The story gives a clear example of how Ọ̀rìṣà's *àṣẹ* (the vital forces ascribed to Yorùbá deities such as Ifá/Ọ̀rúnmilà the god of knowledge, Ọ̀gún the god of Iron, Ọ̀sun the water goddess, Ọ̀bàtálá the god of morality, Èṣù the trickster god, Sàngó the god of thunder and lightning, Ọ̀ya the god of the whirlwind, and so forth), are nurtured and activated. Ọ̀sitọ̀la (quoted in Drewal 29) remarks that “in a muddy land, a person slips and falls easily. Those who follow behind beware. These were the words of wisdom spoken to Ọ̀rúnmilà when he was travelling in a strange land of Ejibonmefon.” It goes without a Yorùbá saying that *àgbà se pẹ̀lẹ̀, ilẹ̀ òyọ̀*—an elder should tread carefully because the land is slippery. In the story, Ọ̀rúnmilà is advised to perform sacrifice to be humiliated and subsequently be blessed. But on the way, according to Ọ̀sitọ̀la (quoted in Drewal 29), “he first passed through the market on the outskirts of the town. There, Èṣù decided to humiliate him. Causing it to rain heavily, Èṣù made the land slippery, but Ọ̀rúnmilà persevered. As he reached the marketplace he slipped and fell. [All the sacrificial items, namely] animals' blood, the palm oil, the food splattered all over his body.” The people in the market began to laugh and ridicule Ọ̀rúnmilà as he was so dirty, disgraced, ashamed, and helpless.

If we think of the story as a metaphor for human reproduction, we can interpret the marketplace in the strange land of Ejibonmefon as the world where people from all walks of life compete for *àṣẹ*. This is informed by the Yorùbá belief that *ayé lojà ọ̀run nilé*—the world of the living is a marketplace, while the world of the spirit is our home. In such metaphorical understanding, the outskirts of the town from where Ọ̀rúnmilà falls into the marketplace of Ejibonmefon is our mothers' womb, the doorway to human existence. All the sacrificial items, animals' blood, palm oil, and food, which Ọ̀rúnmilà was advised to carry in a clay bowl on his journey, as well as the heavy rain—probably symbolizing the breaking of the waters during childbirth—can be understood as things that make one easily slip and fall into the world of the living from the world of the unborn. For this reason, the ontological journey to the strange land of Ejibonmefon can be understood as the natural/biological process through which every living being travels from the world of the unborn to the world of the living, where they constantly experience rebirth through the Yorùbá rites of passage.

The marketplace of Ejibonmefon is conceived as a strange land not only because the world is strange to us at birth but also because the world becomes strange to us again when we experience downfall, which always offers a transition into a new world of being and becoming. Ejibonmefon is a strange world where not all the people who laugh when we are born are celebrating our birth. In other words, it is a world where some people are actually ridiculing us because we are helpless, as when we experience a downfall. Thus, the wisdom of the story, according to Drewal (30), “is not to beware of slipping and falling, but has to do with humility, humiliation, and reciprocity. Ọ̀rúnmilà withstood humiliation only to be blessed with fame and wealth. [...]. Ọ̀rúnmilà learned humility through the experience of humiliation, while those who humiliated him suffered most and, in the end, paid the greater price.” This is because Èṣù, the Yorùbá trickster God who decided to humiliate Ọ̀rúnmilà, also advised the people (who laugh and ridicule Ọ̀rúnmilà) to consult Ifá for solutions to their various problems.

It is based on the interpretation of *àṣẹ* directly from the oracular story of Ifá that one can clearly see what the difference in approach means for the understanding of the Yorùbá and Bantu ancestor concepts we discuss in this paper. Whereas the concept of *ntu* is mainly discussed among academic philosophers, our interpretation from the oracular story of Ifá/Ọ̀rúnmilà shows that we are dealing with a living tradition of narration. Despite this difference, we claim that in both cases, one can speak of a living tradition, of which one has moved more into academic philosophy, while the other still functions as an oral philosophical practice.

Òrúnmìlà now becomes the first inventor of *àṣẹ* through which Ifá interacts/dialogues with and commands reverence from the world as we know it today. But Ifá remains relevant today because the devotees continue to nurture and activate its *àṣẹ*. It is, therefore, not unpopular to hear from the devotees/Ifá priests that Ifá/Òrúnmìlà is like one's relative who teaches them how to divine and interpret oracular messages. They reiterate the popular saying as a way of affirming or confirming that Òrúnmìlà/Ifá is the source of their *àṣẹ*. That the process of learning through ritual and orature is endless gives credence to Babaláwo Ọsitọla referring to the Yorùbá, in Drewal's book, as "the people of action." Òrúnmìlà remarks that "proficiency in Ifá divination comes from long apprenticeship just as a route becomes familiar through previous exploration. Unfamiliar engagements lead to confusion and disgrace" (Emanuel 203).

It is through personal/life experience and the ontological journey that the various vital forces of òrìṣà and humans are continuously nurtured and activated. The oracular story of Òrúnmìlà provides an example of how òrìṣà's *àṣẹ* are made and nurtured. This made Soyinka (145) assert that

the anthropomorphic origin of uncountable deities is one more leveler of divine class-consciousness but, finally, it is the innate humanity of the [òrìṣà] themselves, their bond with man through a common animist relation with nature and phenomena. Continuity for the Yorùbá operates both through the cyclic concept of time and the animist interfusion of all matter and consciousness.

One can therefore say that *àṣẹ* is not only the source of the continuous ontological journey between the Yorùbá ancestors and their descendants but also the source of what Apter²⁰ describes as a pragmatic rather than a semantic opposition between official, public discourses about the world and "deep knowledge" [ìmò 'jìnlẹ̀] of the Yorùbá world. To further explore the interpretations of *àṣẹ*, we will discuss some further stories and their meaning.

The concept also explains power in society, as we understand from the argumentation that because "like a sceptre, *àṣẹ* must be received from a source outside of, and higher than oneself, which in part explains the Yorùbá custom of consulting Ifá before approval can be given to install an Ọba (ruler) and not infrequently an *olórí* (leader) of a community" (Abiodun 311). What makes kings *al'áṣẹ ikeji òrìṣà* (meaning the possessors or the owners of *àṣẹ* who are next hierarchically to òrìṣà) is *àṣẹ* that comes from a source higher than them. Therefore, Abiodun stresses a Yorùbá saying that *a kì fi ara ẹni joyè*—one does not forcefully issue command over others. *Àṣẹ*, as an authorization, is what makes a king an *al'áṣẹ ikeji òrìṣà*. *Àṣẹ* is the reason for the rites of passage through which a king is authorized to serve, rule, command, and maintain the cosmic balance between the past and the present, the dead and the living, the presence and the absence. In fact, what makes a king popular is deep knowledge [ìmò 'jìnlẹ̀] about the Yorùbá world, which equips them with critical tools to maintain the cosmic balance between the known and the unknown as a way of avoiding the official, public, discourse about the world to degenerate into chaos. And when there is a crisis, a king willing to restore peace and maintain social well-being has the *àṣẹ* to summon his chiefs to the council of elders for dialogue. In fact, the king has the *àṣẹ* to consult Ìyá Ọba, the king's mother (who is not the king's biological mother but the encyclopedia of history/culture in a Yorùbá palace), for deep knowledge. But if a social/communal problem is beyond the range of knowledge of the chiefs, Ìyá Ọba, priests [àwòrò] and priestesses [olórìṣà], diviners [babaláwo] and herbalists [onísẹ̀gùn] and other advisers, then the Yorùbá recourse to Ifá to proffer solution to such problem.

Like the councils of elders, the members of the Ògbóni cult (the most powerful cult/society in the ancient Yorùbáland) are interested in *àṣẹ*, which is nurtured and activated through endless searching for deep knowledge, truth, and justice. Babaláwo Ọsitọla (quoted in Drewal 33) recites the foundational text of the Ògbóni cult that *omọ ilẹ̀ tí aghé l'órí ẹni, yí ò jábọ̀. Òkè l'ẹyẹ fọ wùn. A díá fún àwọn àgbààgbà, Tí wọn níti ikẹlẹ̀ ọrun bọ wá ilé ayé, wọn ní kinni wọn nílọ se? Ènìyín ọ̀rò, níbo lò nílọ? À nílọ wá ìmọ̀, ọ̀títọ̀, àti ọ̀dodo...*—a child who is meant to sleep on a bare floor will fall even if we place them on the mat. A bird soars high and/or speaks up. The aphorism interprets

the Ifá message for the elders when they prepare to travel from the world of the spirits to the world of the living. They said, what are you going to do? They asked themselves, where are we going? Where will we search for deep knowledge, truth, and justice? Here, we see a further exploration of vital force in the living tradition of the Ògbóni/Òsùgbó, as expressing the search for knowledge, truth, and justice as a continuous and unending journey.

Another layer of understanding focuses on the meaning of women in the dynamic ontology connected with *àṣẹ*. Yorùbá culture views menstrual blood as symbolic of *àṣẹ* and rites of passage. It is believed that the potency of *àṣẹ* can be destroyed when in contact with menstrual blood. But to the Yorùbá, *àṣẹ* must continuously be renewed through rites of passage. This belief is based on the common experience that menstruation marks a transition between the end of a circle and the beginning of a new one. That would explain the reason why Awo Fatunmbi (quoted in Washington 17) argues that "Ifá scripture suggests that women have *ọfọ àṣẹ* [the ability to pray effectively] as a consequence of menstruation. Men receive *ọfọ àṣẹ* as a consequence of initiation. Because the power of the word is a natural birthright of women, this power has been erroneously associated with 'witchcraft' by those who have tried to give it a negative connotation. In line with Awo Fatunmbi, who claims that women are naturally endowed with *ọfọ àṣẹ*, Teresa Washington explains that *àṣẹ* to practice witchcraft is, in fact, nurtured and activated through the rituals of *Àwọn Ìyàmi Àjẹ* who are described as "our mothers, our powers, and our texts."²¹

All the different but intrinsically related meanings and interpretations of *àṣẹ* described above show that, while interpreting directly from verbal lines and/or stories, the concept appears to explain the deeper layers of meaning that relate to the similar concept of vital force or *ntu*. Cross-culturally, both concepts express African understandings of human existence in its life-world, a world that is characterized by a dynamic ontology. While our genealogical tracing of both concepts through different discourses shows their overlap, the older, both the colonial and postcolonial, approaches in religious, anthropological, and philosophical studies have hindered and complicated the understanding of *àṣẹ* and *ntu* as being conceptual ancestors of the now globalized concept of vital force. In both the ongoing oral tradition of Ifá philosophy and the mostly scriptural philosophical discussions on *ntu*, we can conclude that these ancestors inspire living philosophical traditions that remain in the ownership of those who keep them.

Conclusion: Ntu, Àṣẹ, and Lineages of Descent

We can conclude from the above how oral and traditional concepts from Bantu and Yorùbá cultures, despite the 'civilizing' attempts of the colonial systems that were intended to disturb and replace African epistemic traditions, have been of continuous importance, as well in living communities and their sagacity practices, as in their hybrid intercultural translations in scholarly discussions following and eventually moving beyond Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy*. Therefore, we have considered them ancestor concepts, which means they are projected as concepts that inspire present-day reflection and conceptual theorizing. Archival research shows that although Tempels did not explicitly claim to describe one general African system of ontology and limited his work to the Bantu cultures he knew, he did believe that 'primitive' or 'primary' thoughts worldwide have certain characteristics in common.²² He concluded that all world philosophies, except the hegemonic modern European thought, focus more on life, vitality, and dynamism as both the moving force of all beings and the focus for human fulfillment/happiness/salvation.

One may contest Tempels' more generalizing ideas on dynamic world philosophies, as they are not based on an intensive study of all these philosophies, except for the Bantu philosophy itself. Two things are worth noting, however. First, Tempels' unifying approach to what one could call a *global philosophy of life force* is consistent with his continuous critique of European epistemic and cultural dominance, as well as his more detailed critique of ethnography as a purely descriptive science, which is not working for the peoples it studies.²³ Looking back from

our present age, we can conclude that a strong focus on the detailed description of local differences often does not support anti-colonial resistance but rather the opposite: it helps to keep (neo-)colonial domination in place. Unifying the world epistemic systems against 'Europe' as Tempels did, even if this may be contested as failing in good scholarship, can be understood on the contrary as a politically motivated approach to creating philosophical solidarity among oppressed cultures who struggle for deeper self-determination than the (post-)colonial political situation allows.

The second point pertains to the debate on whether Tempels was right to project from his understanding of Bantu philosophy to a general African philosophy. Especially after the supportive publication of John S. Mbiti's attempt to outline general characteristics of African culturalized religious and philosophical ideas,²⁴ readers of Tempels maintained that he generalized a Bantu concept to the whole of Africa.²⁵ Our investigation into the connections between *ntu* and *àṣẹ* may have shown—by means of a case study of a similar concept between two distinct African cultural language regions—that it can be argued meaningfully that different African language groups/cultures share certain basic ontological concepts, as we argued to be the case for vital force.

All the same, it is clear from the differences between Tempels and Kagame that the very articulation of a universal philosophical concept such as vital force already presupposes a philosophy that has become incarnated in writing culture and therefore becomes subject to critical debate about conceptual choices—thus when we speak of *ntu* or *àṣẹ* in present-day African philosophy, we cannot claim to speak of pre-colonial concepts in their original form. Neither do we contend that these concepts stand in a definite historical causal relation to the present-day discussions on vital force among African(a) philosophers. However, they can be seen as conceptual ancestors, namely concepts that are projected as primary and inspirational for present-day African philosophies.

We hope to have thus shown that traditional African oral or linguistic concepts are still at work in living narratives and their universalized, written-down, and contested progeny. In this sense, we can say that these concepts work in living traditions while not being entirely determined by their encounters with the Western dominating powers nor by the African struggle for liberation. Instead, they can be seen to express African people's relations to the world, as well as their reflections on the place of humanity in it, in an independently ongoing manner as part of living conceptual traditions. We have proposed to call this effect their non-colonial²⁶ functioning. We hope to have thus made sense of a post-postcolonial and non-colonial reading of the genealogies of vital force.

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Notes

¹ See Diop ("Foreword to *La Philosophie Bantoue*"). *Négritude* was a movement to inspire pride in traditional Black culture, similar to the American Black Consciousness movement. It mainly addressed francophone Africans. The term *Négritude* was coined by Aimé Césaire and popularized by Léopold Sédar Senghor and Alioune Diop from Senegal.

- ² See Césaire (*Discourse on Colonialism*).
- ³ See Mudimbe (*The Invention of Africa*).
- ⁴ Bantu and Yorùbá refer to two major language groups on the African continent. While Bantu languages are primarily spoken from Central Africa to the East as well as the South of the continent (with some areas in West Africa as well), Yorùbá languages are mainly spoken in West Africa (Nigeria, Togo, Benin, e.g.).
- ⁵ It is to be noted that 'descent' does not refer to a causal, historical dependency, but rather to the recognition and ascription of a primordial status, precisely a status of dependency by way of inspiration.
- ⁶ See Monga-Kasimba ("La hiérarchie tempelsienne de l'être à la lumière de la culture Luba Shakandi").
- ⁷ See Senghor, quoted in Diagne (*African Art as Philosophy*); Ramose (*African Philosophy through Ubuntu*); Ogbonnaya ("The question of 'being' in African Philosophy"); Negedu ("Beyond the four categories of African Philosophy").
- ⁸ See Drewal (*Yoruba Ritual*).
- ⁹ See Makinde (*African Philosophy, Culture, and Traditional Medicine*).
- ¹⁰ See Apter ("Que Faire? Reconsidering Inventions of Africa").
- ¹¹ See Abiodun ("Àṣẹ: Verbalizing and Visualizing Creative Power through Art").
- ¹² "However, in Bantu language, the stem without the determinative is meaningless. The stem cannot stand alone and at the same time, it loses all the concreteness that accrues from it" (Negedu 10).
- ¹³ See Tempels' letter to Possoz of February 2, 1946, in the KADOC archive, Letters of Placide Tempels BE/942855/815 – 13–14.
- ¹⁴ Smet provides a good overview of the politics that played in the book publication of *Bantu Philosophy* in his Avant-propos for his online critical French translation of the book (see <http://www.aequatoria.be/tempels/FTCriticalEditon.htm>). The translation problems with *Bantu Philosophy* have only come to light very late, mainly through two scholars proficient in Dutch and the languages of translation in the 1990s and 2000s. In a short article published in *Quest* in 1993, Willem Storm drew attention to the fact that Pastor Colin King's 1959 English translation had not been made from the original book, but from the French, and therefore repeats the omissions, changes in chapter titles, and deletion of Tempels' preface and numerous footnotes. Moreover, it adds new modifications that made the text more condescending in places. Another Dutch scholar, Henk Haenen, noticed unusual details, this time in the French translation, and provided the reader with several significant examples (see Haenen, *Afrikaans denken. Ontmoeting, dialoog en frictie. Een filosofisch onderzoek*).
- ¹⁵ King's translation (55) reads: "a Bantu one day explaining the concept of *mntu* to one of my colleagues..."
- ¹⁶ See Mbiti (*African Religions and Philosophy*).
- ¹⁷ See Ogbonnaya ("The question of 'being' in African Philosophy").
- ¹⁸ Monga-Kasimba (2022, 214–215) discusses the relation between Whitehead's process philosophy and the meaning of vital force in *Bantu Philosophy*.
- ¹⁹ This seems to correspond to Senghor's understanding of vital force as the dynamic reality that expresses itself in African arts and wisdom telling. See above.
- ²⁰ See "Que Faire? Reconsidering Inventions of Africa."
- ²¹ While the discourse of Ìyàmi Àjé is beyond this paper, it is not uncommon to hear from an Àjé that "it is Ìyàmi who gave me àṣẹ" (Washington 20) as a way of affirming and confirming the source of their àṣẹ the vital force and/or the power of reproduction, of creativity, and of retributive justice.
- ²² See Placide Tempels' letters to Émile Possoz from October 29 and November 12, 1946. This correspondence shows that Tempels studied Indian (Hindu) and Chinese (Daoist) philosophy as well as Native American philosophy, through ethnographic descriptions.
- ²³ Thus, he already saw what Edward Saïd (*Orientalism*, especially Chapter 1) later described as the knowledge/power system that defines colonial sciences.
- ²⁴ See Mbiti (*African Religions and Philosophy*).
- ²⁵ The most prominent voice to raise this point was Okot p'Bitek's. For this position and a critique, see Mosima (60).
- ²⁶ We introduced this concept here to indicate the ongoing and living heritage of a certain people and its culture, that may go underground under colonial cultural repression or restrict itself to areas of life the colonials were not interested in to transform through their 'civilizing' projects.

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Kwasi Wiredu's Moral and Social Philosophy: Community and the Birth of Personhood

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Abstract: This article explores Kwasi Wiredu's argument that personhood is a status to be obtained through one's community instead of being given on account of being born a human. Therefore, a person becomes (or loses) their personhood through communal engagement. This makes personhood a moral and political concept with massive implications for how Western philosophy perceives the self and the other. I argue that these moral and political implications are much stronger than many want to realize. Wiredu's account, if accepted, compels one to reconceive the notion of personal development, worldhood, and what decolonization entails.

Keywords: personhood, Kwasi Wiredu, communalism, African philosophy, the self, the other

1. Introduction

Within Western philosophy, the notion of a person, or 'the self,' is often a presumed identifier of an individual when exploring questions such as epistemology, morality, and especially subjectivity. However, through decolonial scholarship and explorations of communalism within the Global South, the concept of the self and/or person has become a site of critical re-examination with broad-reaching implications. This article contributes to this ongoing discourse by examining Kwasi Wiredu's genealogical analysis of communalism and how one becomes a person through community.

What Wiredu's perspective adds to the discourse is that, for him and his Akan heritage, being a 'person' is a qualitative achievement whereby personhood is bestowed upon a human being through their community (Wiredu, "Social Philosophy in Postcolonial Africa" 336). One can also lose their personhood if they fail to achieve specific moral obligations within that community (Wiredu, "An Oral Philosophy of Personhood" 16). Importantly, though, when one loses their personhood, it is not that the community condemns the individual as much as it is a recognition that someone is in moral danger. This emphasizes that the individual needs the community's help to restore themselves and reconcile whatever wrong made them lose their personhood in the first place (see Eze and Metz). Drawing upon Akan philosophy, Wiredu's notion of personhood within/through community articulates that personhood—or selfhood, in a phenomenological locution—is not a given and is not something biologically or metaphysically essential to being human. Personhood, thus, is inherently moral and political since it is a status to be achieved.

Accordingly, Wiredu's notion of personhood and community spirals outward to encompass both an interpersonal ethics and a wider, communal (and eventually global) ethic, which he describes through the concept of impartiality and a broad reading of the so-called Golden Rule.¹ Wiredu's ("Social Philosophy in Postcolonial Africa" 334–335) notion of becoming a person through community also lends itself toward questioning the Western, dominant forms of selfhood and/or personhood, which, on the whole, tend toward individualism (as an ethics) and an isolated consciousness perceiving phenomena on its own (as an existential-phenomenological

presupposition or metaphysical concept). Finally, this notion of personhood is fundamentally moral and thus holds vast socio-political implications for both self and communal identity.

Accordingly, this article will present Wiredu's notion of personhood-through-community so that it can tease out the political and moral implications embedded within it. I first set a foundation for this exploration by backgrounding Wiredu's philosophical approach and its aims to clarify that my scope is a stand-alone reading of Wiredu's personal-communal framework, which Wiredu built throughout his philosophical career. Afterward, I will describe this personal-communal framework, which will then lead to a final section where I engage its moral, political, and decolonial implications. I will then conclude by addressing Wiredu's critics and, in so doing, will present a few challenges that open Wiredu to conversation with other decolonial approaches. Namely, I will seek to answer whether his employment of 'the Golden Rule' and his notion of 'conceptual decolonization' hold the gravity for a truly transformative encounter between a person, their community, and the world at large.

2. Situating Wiredu: Wiredu's Philosophical Approach

As Barry Hallen (*Reading Wiredu* 2) summarizes, it is essential to recognize that Wiredu is an essayist, and there "is no book by him that provides a synoptic, comprehensive overview of his thought." What this means for us is that, while there are conceptual threads woven throughout his work, as an essayist, Wiredu covers various issues within ethics and political philosophy, the Analytic philosophical tradition, as well as African philosophy. Furthermore, like Serequeberhan, he began his career amidst the ethno- and professional philosophy debates. Yet, contrary to Serequeberhan, who eschewed the debate as *Gestellungen* (en-framed) within Western confines, Wiredu (*Cultural Universals and Particular* 136–138)² agrees with Hountondji that African philosophical thought must tightly hew to a rational basis for (or defense of) its claims (136–138).³ Importantly, Wiredu believed that many ethno-philosophers were still in a "semi-anthropological paraphrase of African traditional beliefs" and that the way out of colonial entrapment was to form rational arguments that at once critically engage the West while employing/developing Africa's indigenous rationalities and traditions (Wiredu, "On Defining African Philosophy" 88).⁴ This process is what he eventually calls "conceptual decolonization."⁵

Wiredu thus described himself as a philosopher who employed John Dewey's "genetic method," which entails a deep, empirical analysis of cultural mores and language (Wiredu, "What is Philosophy?" 164–165). Through this method, Wiredu utilizes a linguistic-cultural investigation of African traditional thought that analytically challenges philosophies within both Western and African contexts (Hallen, *Reading Wiredu* 20). For Wiredu, Dewey's genetic method breaks open the conceptual canons of rationality so that one can further investigate the "patterns" that emerge from "our interaction with the environment," meaning both our physical and social environments (Wiredu, "Kwasi Wiredu: The Making of a Philosopher" 331). This consequently allows one to investigate not just knowledge as such but the epistemological-linguistic frameworks that deem certain things as knowledge and others as superstition, unsubstantiated claims, etc. For Wiredu, this method allows him to analytically define the rationality of a given culture/community and how their truth claims are comparable to others through translation (see Wiredu, "How Not to Compare African Traditional Thought with Western Thought"; Hallen, *Reading Wiredu* 20–25, 33–36). Translation holds significant importance to Wiredu since the ability to translate ideas between different languages proves that there must be some 'universals' germane to all cultures.

For those unfamiliar with Wiredu's primary influence, John Dewey was a pragmatist who emphasized how thinking itself was not merely an abstract activity but, rather, a worldly and concrete activity since thinking is always already bound to the language in which one is thinking. This language is built within the world, and the terms, verbs, grammar, etc., were derived

from concrete observations. This means one's cultural mores are built upon those observable experiences formed through one's given language. Thus, a genetic method explores how these worldly linguistic-cultural constructs form ideas about the world (epistemology, metaphysics), which entails an ethics or at least a pattern of governance through which those ideas are employed within the world/society (see Hallen, *Reading Wiredu* 46–48).

Returning to Wiredu, the final important aspect of his thinking is that he defines his Akan heritage, as well as other African systems of thought, as a distinct and unique form of empiricism, which he calls 'empiricism.' For Wiredu, a primary issue with the Western gaze upon African traditional thought is that it is either seen as too abstract (i.e., supernatural) or too immanent, neither of which lends itself to authentic philosophical reflection ("An Oral Philosophy of Personhood" 46–47).⁶ Addressing these concerns, Wiredu ("Empiricism" 22) notes that "the familiar claim is that African thinking is exhaustively empirical and innocent of metaphysical reflection. This is quite a severe misunderstanding. A mode of thinking can be both empirical and metaphysical, and I ... [argue] that traditional Akan metaphysics is an empirical metaphysic." In defining what he calls 'empiricism,' Wiredu (33) states that it "is the adherence to the empirical imperative without the sensationalistic incoherencies of empiricism. It is the view which close attention to the conceptual intimations of my own culture renders the most plausible to me regarding the fundamental character of human knowledge."

Wiredu's philosophical approach thus engages the analytic tradition, holds an autoethnographic component, and also employs critical, genealogical hermeneutics. It is rather difficult to slot into any particular school (Western or African), which Barry Hallen (see *Reading Wiredu* 22–24, 30–32; "Book Review" 175–176) argues is why many critiques against Wiredu are often misplaced or derived from poor readings of his texts. For example, some critics question his conceptualization of Akan and African culture as being too utopic and that he shaves off certain nuances, such as Akan notions of faith, to craft his own philosophical stance (see Gyekye; Molefe, "A Critique of Kwasi Wiredu's Humanism and Impartiality"). Other critics engage whether his moral and political philosophies are viable or have enough decolonial impetus to create change, regardless of their fidelity to the Akan tradition (see Bernard Matolino; E. C. Eze; Osha). For our purposes, I will touch upon these critiques in the final section and conclusion to open Wiredu to conversation with the larger decolonial discourse.

With that said, it is crucial that we read Wiredu as a stand-alone thinker and not merely an extension of Akan thought. Taking this approach brings his notion of personhood as a status to be achieved into full relief. From this, we can better understand the hermeneutic and moral tensions that give rise to this status and how, once someone achieves their personhood through/within their community, we can explore whether a said person can or cannot proceed to change that community—either through conceptual decolonization or otherwise.

3. Wiredu's Philosophical Anthropology: How a Human Becomes a Person

I have found that D. A. Masolo articulates Wiredu's notion of personhood best since he contrasts Wiredu with Kant to describe Wiredu's notion of personhood while highlighting Wiredu's critique against Western universalism (see Etyiebo). Concerning the latter, Masolo (139–141, 149–154) argues that Wiredu directly critiques how particular notions of personhood, articulated from one culture to the next, are discarded by Western modernity or, at best, flattened out to become analogs to Western rationality.

As Masolo argues, Kant arrives at a philosophical anthropology *after* his three famous critiques, whereas Wiredu inverts this and begins with an anthropology from which he then explores its implications. Kant and those influenced by him typically argue that philosophy follows a certain linear path: first, it questions "What can I know?"; then, "What ought I do?"; afterward, it asks, "What can I hope for?"; finally, it arrives at "What is man?" Furthering this

and quoting Kant, Masolo highlights how specific branches of philosophy address these issues: the first question is covered by metaphysics, the second by morality/ethics, the third by religion, and the fourth by anthropology (137).⁷

For Masolo, echoing Wiredu, beginning from a metaphysics and then moving toward an anthropology, unduly introduces presumptions on what a person is and is not (138). Contrariwise, Wiredu's exploration of anthropology as 'first philosophy' recognizes how one's rationality is shaped by what an individual knows about themselves and how they conductively employ this knowledge within the world. Furthermore, Wiredu argues that metaphysics itself is not a universal foundation of reason from which one's self-understanding arises. Rather, it is the individual coming to a sense of their own existence in relation to their community/world which creates a metaphysics. As Masolo (138) states:

While Kant starts with human nature as phenomenologically complete in its (metaphysical) constitution at least in the domain of understanding, Wiredu seeks to establish the view that such defining characteristics of being human are not endowed in humans by a force that exists outside an already existing environment of the deliberate actions of other humans, namely the socializing processes out of which the actualization of human capacities emerges. Thus, Wiredu argues, in an Aristotelian fashion, [sic] what makes humans humans cannot be their psychology, for this is an already-constituted aspect of them.

In sum, Wiredu is wary of any categorical or transcendental concepts that endow oneself with identity. Being human is merely a biological fact, and Wiredu (tongue in cheek yet matter-of-factly) states that humans are merely "featherless bipeds dispersed over the surface of the world" (Wiredu, "Identity as an Intellectual Problem" 215). Therefore, self-understanding is a psycho-philosophical issue of the mind which develops through empirical engagements with the world. Recall that Wiredu draws upon an Akan-African worldview that he calls 'empiricism,' whereby one's potentiality for personhood and identity is constituted through concrete encounters, which then develop into a systematic framework of understanding (i.e., an empirical metaphysics built upon encounters that are understood through culture and its given language or languages). The mind is always already in the process of becoming, and, as we will see below, its endgame is achieving a robust moral personhood that is esteemed from one featherless biped to another through communal-social relations. Concerning the issue of mind and its procurement of self-understanding, or identity, Wiredu (214) states:

We are born human beings by virtue of our biology and inherited potentials, but we become persons only by socialization. This is the process by which we not only develop the powers of our mind but also, more importantly, begin to have any sort of mind at all. In other words, we are not born with a mind that is a *tabula rasa* ... *Rather we are born with only the potential for one.* The acquisition, through suckling, nursing, and nurturing by parents or persons in loco parentis, of the gestured rudiments of language is the first hint of a baby's pretension to mind. Even this much is already heavily laden with culture, that is, with a certain particular way of becoming sensitive to "the other" and subsequently cognizant of the self. In due course, one acquires a working command of a mother tongue (emphasis mine).

From this, the resultant question becomes how one can explore identity and philosophical anthropology without outside categories, transcendental or otherwise. This is where Dewey's influence enters the picture. Wiredu argues that one can begin to understand how identity or personhood are developed through a genetic exploration of linguistic-cultural norms. Furthermore, such an approach shows that universal categories cannot describe personhood, and neither can culturally relativistic, particular rationalities. The fact that language and culture are translatable shows that there are some universals at play, but they are expressed in particular ways unique to the truth values within their own linguistic culture. As he states plainly, "human beings cannot live by particulars or universals alone, but by some combination of both" (Wiredu, *CUP* 9).

The way in which Wiredu connects particulars and universals is through language. Following Dewey's genetic method (though not cited directly in this section of *Cultural Universals and Particulars*), he argues that communication and, thus, language are biological necessities for humans to survive. Wiredu even goes as far as saying that cultural universals are "vital communications" that are *sine qua non* for the existence of the human species (21). 'This is where to find food,' 'This is where to find shelter,' 'Beware of the predators over there'; all these communications are necessary for such featherless bipeds to survive in an unstable, harmful world.

This communication is an "evolutionary force" and the "cultural universal *par excellence*" which, in tandem with survival, establishes humans as social creatures (41, 28). Formal languages with set grammatical rules and vocabularies evolve from these rudimentary communications and give rise to culture(s). Out of these cultures comes a system of morality on how to conduct oneself within said community, and crucially, these systems of governance also become the means of knowledge creation. Thus, from survival to culturally produced knowledge, Wiredu locates language and its evolution as how communities bind themselves together and hand down their traditions to future generations.

This binding happens when a social group evolves its communication beyond a system of survival to create meaningful ties and, in this process, conceives a culture amongst its members. Importantly, these meaningful ties arise through the evolutionary force of language. As Wiredu states, "the notion of different persons perceiving or apprehending the same entity presupposes a system of interpersonal correlation of inner experiences with external reality, which is inconceivable without communication" (19). For Wiredu, this happens as a matter of course, almost instinctively: "Given a common language as a medium of communication, various things will be defined ... according to the semantical rules operative in the given language. ... speaking literally, it is not the community that does the defining [i.e., in a judicial, authoritative sense]; it is the individuals who do it, using rules developed in the community" (Wiredu, "Social Philosophy in Postcolonial Africa" 338).

Through this anthropological, genealogical account, Wiredu argues that "a human being is a rule-following animal, and language is nothing but an arrangement of rules" (CUP25, 27). These rules—either in grammar/syntax, ethics/culture, rationalities/epistemologies—become the structures by which both personhood and community co-develop. Subsequently, each community's rules become the cultural particulars that arise from humanity's universal, biological needs.

Masolo was right to contrast Kant and Wiredu because Wiredu's account of rationality is not fixed nor endowed by the facticity of life itself. Contrariwise, Wiredu argues that rationality and the development of the mind are themselves constructs to describe how a human being first survives life and then develops their sense of self within their community. This community frames this sense-self through its morality, which is communicated through a particular language-culture that is taught or handed down. Crucially, this morality and its language-culture frames meaning and, eventually, epistemology:

[The capacity to be rational] has tremendous implications. It implies, for example, that we (human beings) are capable of learning from our experience of the environment and of adjusting, or trying to adjust, our behavior to the constraints of that experience. Now the environment is of two basic types. There is a natural and there is a social environment. The constraints of the natural environment arise from our contact with physical objects and forces [i.e., *empiricism*]. In terms of detail, different peoples react differently to the environment, but in basic essentials, there is only one human way of doing this. And that is the pursuit of survival and well-being through action on the basis of perception and inference [i.e., *meaning-making/epistemology*]. From the standpoint of cognitive biology, then, there is a basic way of being in the world. That is to say, there is a basic culture common to all human beings. There is another species-wide cultural commonality. It appertains to the conditions of the social environment. It is a necessary truth about human beings that

they live in societies. But to live in a society is, in general, to have some conception of other selves in contrast to oneself [*i.e.*, *personhood*]. At the minimum, this involves having a sense of one's own interests in relation to the interests of others. It involves also, beyond this, some sense of the need to harmonize these interests, which, by any account, are apt frequently to conflict. This need is the root of all morality. The rules for securing that minimum of harmony required by the survival of human community constitute morality in the strictest sense. In this sense, morality is the same for all humans. This, then, is a second element of unity in human nature and culture. (Wiredu, "Reflections on Cultural Diversity" 204; brackets are mine)

So far, one sees how communication is a biological and social necessity, but the moral implications of personhood need more fleshing out. Wiredu argues that Akan and, more broadly, African communities endow individuals with personhood, and thus, being a person requires an individual to be 'seen' or accepted by their community. This happens through social engagements whereby the individual achieves good standing through their community's morality. To my mind, some analogs to Akan-African personhood can be seen in religious rituals such as Christian baptism or Jewish bar/bat mitzvahs; here, one becomes accepted into the community—essentially becoming 'one of them'—through performing a systematic ritual. Systematic, here, is imperative since each moral-social framework must have an impartial basis: impartial in that it applies to all persons, thus becoming the foundation upon which one can judge their own actions (see Wiredu, "Moral Foundations of an African Culture" 196–198).

Wiredu also adds that this impartiality is constantly being negotiated between the person's own interests and their community's, seeking harmony between the two. This allows a dynamism to individual morality—lest it becomes too rigid and *impersonal*—while also opening a space for morality to develop and change according to the person and their society's needs. Wiredu ("Social Philosophy in Postcolonial Africa" 334) calls this negotiation an "empathetic impartiality" and equates it to the Gold Rule, or some non-Christian analog, where one always ought to treat others as they want to be treated.

For now, we can see how empathetic impartiality sets the rules through which one becomes a person within a given community (see Wiredu, *CUP* 29). It gives someone a baseline for understanding their role within the community by providing the criteria for that community's culture and collective self-understanding. One can see this in constitutions written by communities either in the political sphere (e.g., national constitutions) as well as in the religious sphere (e.g., theological doctrines), and especially in epistemologies and methodologies which categorically decipher what is knowledge, superstition, and/or trivia.

Significantly and finally, since language can be translated and therefore cultural exchanges can exist, one can at once see the universality of culture being language-bound as basically essential for life to flourish but also see the particularity of each culture since they require translation in the first place (25–26). If they could not be translated, then they could not be universal; if they did not need translation, then they could not be particular. One needs both possibilities to understand how personhood and community establish harmonies. Moreover, one needs both possibilities to understand how these featherless bipeds dispersed across the earth are the same species and how they communicatively self-identify through their given culture.

Wiredu therefore comes full circle: communication is essential to the biological survival of the human species. This commutative survival evolves to develop meaning-making and culture through established languages. Thus, a linguistically bound epistemological framework is crafted, which, as a framework, is nothing but a set of rules through which one crafts an understanding of the world and/or themselves. This language-culture's rules help bind a community through evolving into an impartial morality through which a community weighs and judges individuals. Seeking harmony, individuals employ the same language-culture's morality to judge their community. Through this co-esteem between individual and community, a

dynamic relationship evolves culture to develop concrete, empirical epistemologies through which they both engage in critical reflection to further discover their world and evolve their moral sensibilities. This engagement with the world entails cross-cultural exchanges, which is only possible if there is a baseline of language and morality as biologically vital and as an intellectually evolutionary force that is essential to being human. Thus, we arrive at a universal notion of what it is to be human and a culturally particular notion of what it means to be a person in a given society.

4. Wiredu's Conceptual Decolonization: The Implications of Personhood via Community

To my mind, Wiredu's philosophy employs a particular type of relational logic. Since communication is needed for survival, and thus a conveyance of information from one to another, the entire framework is based upon relationships between shared inferences and, eventually, shared language-cultures. Relational logic from the bottom to the top, his entire project emphasizes that anything known as 'fact' or 'knowledge' only becomes so through their communal acceptance. This consequently emphasizes the political and moral nature of not just personhood but the epistemological framework through which personhood is understood (Wiredu, "What is Philosophy?" 164–165).⁸ Everything is moral, right down to being a person or even knowing which plants are food and which are poisonous. The fact that there is translatability between language-cultures shows, for Wiredu, that there are moral aspects at work within a particular culture that are constantly being negotiated. To further describe this, I will give a brief illustration.

Traditionally, one cannot be a father without a child to parent, and one cannot be a husband without a wife. Furthermore, one cannot be a 'man' without a shared network of references that designate proper masculinity. Here, the designations of father, husband, and masculinity are related to both other persons (such as parenting a child) and to cultural-moral norms (such as obtaining the requirements for 'manliness'). There are impartial baselines to obtain these characteristics of one's self-identity and personhood.

However, these norms and referents are constantly renegotiated. First, some fathers abandon their kids and are thus considered poor fathers or not even fathers at all, especially by their now-abandoned children. Also, someone else can take up the father's role and become the father to a child without being biologically related. Second, many societies have renegotiated what a 'husband' is. The obvious example is the recognition of same-sex marriages, but also, if one betrays or abuses their partner, then they may lose their privilege to be a husband either by divorce or force of law; the latter locates a certain impartiality where society legally intervenes. Either way, the husband may forfeit any rights and privileges of this social esteem. Finally, the concept of masculinity is constantly renegotiated within culture up to the point where the gendered notion of 'man' has changed, in the West at least, to a performative act (*à la* Judith Butler), and the moral acts that characterize 'good' masculinity have changed too (as seen within the discourse on toxic masculinity). These examples show how identity is not static: it is neither self-given nor arbitrarily endowed by the community. In both an individual and socially negotiated sense, these aspects of one's personhood are relational to a network of referents that judge the behavior of the individual in question and deem them worthy of these characteristic identifiers. Ultimately, all of these characteristics are dynamically relational.

Concerning translatability, it is obvious that different cultures have various notions of what is (or who can be) a father, a husband, or a man. The fact that we can notice these differences is a form of translation since we recognize these characteristics in other cultures. Furthermore, rightly or wrongly, the fact that we judge another culture's definitions of these characteristics furthers the point that they are indeed translatable. Conversely, the fact that we can notice

different practices of fatherhood, marital relationships, and masculinities across cultures means that we can also weigh and measure our own culture's practices. Through these cross-cultural exchanges, we develop our own culture's notions by accepting or rejecting principles from others. Or, contrariwise, we can condemn the practices of another culture's principles, rightly or wrongly, but hopefully productively and in conversation with that culture. Either way, translatability always already holds a moral component since one culture is constantly judging both its and the others' norms, regardless of whether it is implicit or explicit. Note that 'moral' here simply means that there is a value-ethics at work in these intercultural translations and negotiations.

For Wiredu ("Are There Cultural Universals?" 60), the moral ideal for this translatability is exemplified in the Golden Rule in its various articulations. In whatever version it is expressed, the resonance of treating others as one wishes to be treated still resonates. For Wiredu, a global ethics binds all cultures together since our universal need for survival requires that we be social creatures who need to live in harmony with each other. The Golden Rule thus provides an impartial basis for social harmony. What gives a culture its own identity is how it particularly articulates and practices the Golden Rule, which Wiredu ("On the Idea of a Global Ethic" 46) localizes as "an ethic." As Motsamai Molefe ("An African Perspective on the Partiality and Impartiality Debate" 472)⁹ summarizes, "thus an ethic refers to subgroup-specific rules and/or norms for regulating human life in these groups; and ethics refers to the 'necessary laws for (all) human behaviour.' ... And, I might add, both are needed for a robust human life" (472).

Here again, we see the universal and particular at play: ethics maintains a fundamental universality that is tied to survival, and the ethic is the given praxis within a specific community. For Wiredu, this moves the moral aspect of translatability into politics since cultures can debate, adopt, or impart their ethic to another culture since they share a basic ethics (see Wiredu, "Society and Democracy in Africa"; "Democracy by Consensus"). For our purposes, what this shows is, again, from bottom to top, that there is a relational logic at play that is at once moral and political. The ultimate goal of this morality, whether locally or globally, is to seek harmonization, either between person and community or between one community and another (Wiredu, "Society and Democracy in Africa" 35).

Yet, what happens if people are forcefully initiated into an alien culture through events such as colonization? Here, the effects of this moral miscarriage amount to a severe estrangement between individuals and their respective communities, effectively severing this relational dynamic between them. Consequently, one's sense of personhood dissolves along with the communal fabric woven throughout each person. This sentiment echoes Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's notion that colonialism was a "cultural bomb" which devastated communities by severing people from their language, their heritage, and their sense of self (Ngugi 3).

Having been forced to take up Western norms such as the individualist concept of personhood, the propositional nature of Western logic through Western languages, the adversarial nature of governance, a "colonial mentality" was thus forced upon them (Wiredu, *CUP* 4). They were conscripted by force to take up an identity—a persona—that was pressed upon them, which severed them from their language-culture and, consequently, their sense of personhood. For Wiredu (46–52), this is especially true with Christian missionaries who devalued African Traditional Religions, suppressed native languages, denied any cultural rationality beyond the West, and consequently deprived African peoples of their own sense of personhood and community.

Though Wiredu does not reference Fanon, I find that Fanon's notion of the "fact of blackness" complements Wiredu's reading of colonial personhood and its colonial mentality. Stripped of relational identification, one is seen and called Black by an invading mindset; one loses themselves and resultantly, in Fanon's words "little by little, putting out pseudopodia here and there, I secreted a race" (Fanon 92). Moreover, when the colonized seek liberation—whether in revolution or in the post-colony—they do so through "white liberty and white justice; that is values

secreted by [their] masters" (172). Thus, the colonial mentality, for both Wiredu and Fanon, haunts the postcolonial situation in that what remains for the formerly colonized to rebuild their lives is the colonial artifacts used to subjugate them (Wiredu, *CUP* 92–95, 142–144).

Wiredu's concerns about African philosophy at large follow a similar pattern in that he sees a lurking colonial mentality that haunts the entire enterprise. On the one hand, many ethnophiles present their retrievals in translation for Western constructs and fail to engage them directly. On the other, many professional philosophers fail to adequately consult their own traditions, and their work resultantly fails to achieve any resonance within their own African context (Onah, "The Universal and the Particular in Wiredu's Philosophy of Human Nature" 89–90).

Wiredu's approach splits through both ethno- and professional philosophy in that he calls for a "conceptual decolonization" where the point is not to fall completely to one side or the other, but to disentangle mental colonization through a methodical self-awareness. One cannot get rid of the legacy of the imperial West, nor can one directly return to traditions that have forever been altered. Rather, similar to the themes addressed throughout this article, one has to live with a combination of both. Conceptual decolonization, then, is a disentanglement:

... it is worth repeating that in [conceptual decolonization] there is no assumption that what comes from Africa is necessarily true, sound, profound et cetera. Much less, of course, should there be an over-valuation of what comes from the West. In fact, however, exactly such an overvaluation, at an apparently semi-conscious level, is the hallmark of that infelicity of the mind called the colonial mentality still afflicts us in African philosophy and other areas of African intellectual life. The cure for that mental condition, however, does not require the disavowal of all foreign sources of possible edification. It seems to me likely that any African synthesis for modern living will include indigenous and Western elements, as well as, perhaps, as some from the East. There are good reasons for such catholicity (Wiredu, "Conceptual Decolonization as an Imperative in Contemporary African Philosophy" 54–55).

What conceptual decolonization does, then, is locate the ways in which the colonial "modes of conceptualization" have become instrumental reasonings within African thought. However, rather than discarding Western conceptualizations, Africans may engage them through their "own reflective choices" (56). What this means is that instrumental reasonings/rationalities become transparent and therefore engaging for Africans writ large; they can choose to use Western concepts and methods such as phenomenology or democracy, but they do so with the self-awareness that it is a Western concept which comes with certain presuppositions attached that may need to be modified to fit said African thinker's context. Wiredu's conceptual decolonization essentially employs his relational logic where the formerly colonized are aware of the tensions between their traditional beliefs and the Western, postcolonial ideologies into which they were inculcated. Through this awareness, they do not have to choose one over the other but use both to reckon with their own sense of personal identity, their own moral values, and their interlaced cultural context.

5. By way of Conclusion: Wiredu, his Critics, and First Philosophy

Wiredu has been critiqued as an ethnophilosopher since he reaches back to Akan traditional philosophy to argue his points. Yet, he has also been critiqued as a professional philosopher since he employs analytic philosophy and often engages issues within an analytic context.¹⁰ Furthermore, some thinkers like Sanya Osha (vi) find Wiredu's conceptual decolonization to be too closely attached to an "ethnocentric Western epistemology" to have the intellectual and political force to actually decolonize African life. For Osha (63–69), this epistemology locates a methodological problem within Wiredu's conceptual decolonization, namely that his highly analytic approach tries to bring African traditional thought to the fore, but only as much as it

gives evidence to an analytic proof; it never goes beyond this to explore a deeper interrogation of the methodological and epistemological presumptions underlying its ideal.¹¹

Osha thus champions a decolonial approach that hews closer to a continental philosophical tradition, writ large, against an analytic one that he finds wanting. I bring this up to show how, in some ways, the ethno- and professional philosophy debate has evolved—or perhaps assumed into—the analytic-continental divide within global philosophy. This is relevant since, pace Wiredu, there still remains an entanglement between conceptual canons of thinking whereby the formerly colonized have an either/or decision forced upon them. Contrarily, and in partial defense of Wiredu, a space could exist where one could seek a harmonization between decolonial projects. Rather than picking one epistemological-methodological framework over another, one can find the framework which best relates to their own personal and communal circumstances since neither will prove universally adequate for all the formerly colonized across the globe. Perhaps there is space for both.

To return to personhood and conclude, what Wiredu's conceptual decolonization provides to his notion of communalism is the recognition that the damage of colonialism will not fade away. It is thus a false choice to unreflectively decide between returning to a tradition that is forever altered or maintaining a Western mentality that is forever foreign. Language evolves and may recapture portions of its grammar and vocabulary, but it only does so through re-appropriation and not a wholesale rewrite of its own history, its own becoming. So, too, does our sense of personhood evolve, and the formerly colonized should, according to Wiredu, recapture their traditions but can only authentically (or, in Sartrean terms, in good faith) do so as a re-appropriation that is self-aware of their historico-cultural situation.

Thus, the best pathway to authentic personhood—authentic being broadly construed to apply to various circumstances—is to find a relational harmony between the individual and the community, knowing that the community has been haunted by colonialism and recognizing what colonialism has denied oneself is part and parcel of the personal-communal negotiation. In this sense, the agency of personhood is fully formed in that it directly confronts the colonial mentality perpetuated through the community and challenges the community to transform and decolonize itself by questioning its instrumental reasoning. Again, there is a relational dynamic at play here where individuals within their community (re)negotiate their community's ethic to re-articulate their own notion of the Golden Rule or, more technically, their own reading of a foundational-universal ethics. It can do so through a reappreciation of the community's original language-culture, and the fact that these (re)negotiations carry a translatability with them means that they can negotiate what they wish to appropriate from other cultures, colonizing Western cultures included.

Though Wiredu's conceptual decolonization of the person and community may be benign for some, and I, too, wish it had more force and impetus to galvanize social justice movements, it is ultimately a philosophical anthropology and not a manifesto for change. What Wiredu aims at, whether one agrees with him or not, is to provide the first philosophy *for effective change*, not to provide change itself. Wiredu limits his scope here so that second, third, and further orders of philosophy may emerge. Or, returning to the counterpoint he takes against Kant, if there is going to be a decolonization, it needs to begin with the question 'What is a person?' before it attempts to liberate persons.

Notes

- ¹ See Wiredu ("Are There Cultural Universals" 61–62; *Cultural Universals and Particulars* 56, 109–110; "Moral Foundations of an African Culture" 198). For an overview, see Hallen (*Reading Wiredu* 70–80).
- ² Hereafter *CUP*.
- ³ One can see this especially in Wiredu's critique of a certain, unquestioning notion of faith. See, amongst multiple examples: Wiredu ("Identity as an Intellectual Problem" 212).
- ⁴ Note that Serequeberhan is fond of quoting this passage.
- ⁵ This concept will be covered later, but Wiredu employs this notion often within his work. For an overview, see: *CUP* 136–144, and "Identity as an Intellectual Problem" 224–226.
- ⁶ I use 'African Traditional thought' rather than 'African Traditional Religions' (ATR), to widen the range of rationalities and practices.
- ⁷ Masolo quotes from Kant (13).
- ⁸ See also Graness (32–34); Wiredu (*CUP* 108–110).
- ⁹ He cites Wiredu ("On the Idea of a Global Ethic" 45).
- ¹⁰ It should be noted that Wiredu prefers the 'professional philosopher' distinction albeit in a nuanced way: "Apart from anything else, some might conceivably regard much of the work I have done in Akan philosophy as ethnophilosophy. Be that as it may, I personally prefer to let the term "professional philosopher" refer to anybody who gets paid to teach, and meditate on, philosophy. In this sense, the traditionalists too are generally professional philosophers" (Wiredu, "Kwasi Wiredu: The Making of a Philosopher" 336).
- ¹¹ For similar critiques, see Asouzu (*Ibuaru*) and Edet ("The Question of Conceptual Decolonization in African Philosophy"). For a defense against these critiques, see Carman ("A Defense of Wiredu's Project of Conceptual Decolonization").

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An Existential Interpretation of Evil: A Critique of Èbùn Odùwọ́lé and Kazeem Fáyẹmí on the Philosophical Problem of Evil in Yorùbá Thought

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Abstract: The problem of evil is a perennial issue in metaphysics, philosophy of religion and theology. In Yorùbá thought, it has been approached, appraised, and conceptualised by scholars from different perspectives, usually in the form of thesis and antithesis. For instance, Èbùn Odùwọ́lé and Kazeem Fáyẹmí disagree on whether or not the problem arises in Yorùbá thought and on its nature or formulation, if it does. Relying on the Western logical formulation of the problem, Odùwọ́lé maintains that the problem of evil arises in Yorùbá thought exactly like it does in Western thought; hence, for her, the problem of evil is universal. Against this view, Fáyẹmí contends that the philosophical problem of evil does not arise at all in Yorùbá thought; hence, the problem, according to him, is not universal. Employing the methods of critical exposition and analysis, however, I maintain a position different from those of the two scholars mentioned. I contend, on the one hand, that the existence of the philosophical problem of evil in Yorùbá thought does not necessarily imply the logical formulation of the problem as we have in the West. On the other hand, however, I maintain that the absence of the logical formulation of the problem of evil in Yorùbá thought does not directly imply the absence of the philosophical problem of evil in it. I therefore approach the interpretation of the philosophical problem of evil in Yorùbá thought from an existentialist perspective, drawing insights from some relevant verses of *Ifá*.

Keywords: philosophical problem of evil, Yorùbá thought, Èbùn Odùwọ́lé, Kazeem Fáyẹmí, existential problem of evil

Introduction

Although it has been addressed from different intellectual perspectives and cultural civilisations, the problem of evil still awaits a solution (see Ogundele & Ogunyomi 34). There is a plethora of literature expressing diverse perspectives on the problem of evil in Yorùbá thought.¹ However, this paper focuses on the controversies surrounding the *philosophical* problem of evil in Yorùbá thought. Special attention is devoted to the contention between Èbùn Odùwọ́lé and Kazeem Fáyẹmí on this problem. Odùwọ́lé contends that the attributes of Olódùmarè and the Judeo-Christian God are similar, thereby giving rise to the logical problem of evil, which upholds the incompatibility thesis. However, Fáyẹmí contends that the attributes of Olódùmarè and the Judeo-Christian God are not the same, which, for him, makes Odùwọ́lé's incompatibility thesis untenable and, philosophically, makes evil a non-problem in Yorùbá thought. Accordingly, Fáyẹmí submits that the philosophical problem of evil does not arise in Yorùbá thought.

Nevertheless, while Odùwólé could be said to have expressed a correct view by maintaining that the problem of evil arises in Yorùbá thought, she misses the point by claiming that it has a logical formulation and that Olódùmarè and the Judeo-Christian God share the same attributes – a view which pressurises the problem of incompatibility.

Again, while Fáyemí's view that the attributes of Olódùmarè do not give rise to contradiction, thereby making the incompatibility thesis a non-issue in Yorùbá thought, could be said to be correct, his view that the *philosophical problem of evil* does not arise altogether in Yorùbá thought, is philosophically questionable. Fáyemí seems to have based the latter submission on the logical formulation of the problem of evil, which was raised in the form of a dilemma by Epicurus and subsequently advanced by incompatibilists of various shades like John L. Mackie ('Evil and Omnipotence'), H. J. McCloskey (*God and Evil*), and the rest of them.

However, the logical formulation of the problem of evil is just one out of the numerous *philosophical* formulations of the problem of evil. For instance, there are Manichean, Evidentialist, Existentialist, Buddhist, and Stoic formulations of the problem of evil, and they are as philosophical as the logical formulation of the problem. I argue, therefore, in this paper that the presence of the philosophical problem of evil in Yorùbá thought does not necessarily imply the logical formulation and the absence of the logical problem of evil does not necessarily imply the absence of the *philosophical* problem of evil in Yorùbá thought. Accordingly, I take an existentialist perspective to explain the problem of evil in Yorùbá thought and contend that if the logical problem of evil does not arise, the existential problem of evil arises.

The problem of evil in Yorùbá thought: contentions and (mis)conceptions

The Yorùbá word for evil is *Ibi*, while the word for good is *Ire*. The former (*Ibi*) hinders the happiness and well-being of human beings. It is, therefore, believed to be negative. However, the latter (*Ire*) engenders and enhances the well-being of human beings. Hence, it is believed to be positive. There are different explanations for the reality of evil in the Yorùbá thought system, and those explanations have been explored in one way or another by various scholars who have written from the cultural, religious, or philosophical perspective on the problem of evil in Yorùbá thought. While some scholars stick to the concepts of destination, predestination, determination, fatality and so on to explain the reality of evil in the world (Òràngún 22–39), some attribute the existence of evil to the activities of Èṣù, one of the vital ministers of the Yorùbá God, Olódùmarè (see Dọpamu 103).

In addition, some have argued that evil in the Yorùbá thought system is directly from Olódùmarè and, by extension, that Olódùmarè possesses similar attributes (if not the same) to the Judeo-Christian God, which makes the reality of evil contradictory to the nature of Olódùmarè (Odùwólé 1–13). Furthermore, some have argued that evil results from the freedom and wickedness of human beings (A. O. Balogun). Moreover, some attribute the reality of evil to the activities of some malevolent forces like witches or *Ajogun* (warriors against humans), who are believed to be directly opposed to the benevolent deities and are perceived as eternal enemies of human beings (Abimbólá, *Sixteen Great Poems of Ifá*). Further still, some have argued that although the Yorùbás are aware of evil, the philosophical problem of evil does not arise at all in the Yorùbá thought system because evil is believed to co-exist *necessarily* with good.²

While the above views are fundamental to my discussion of the Yorùbá perspective on the problem of evil, they inhere some elements of prejudice that need to be unravelled. Nevertheless, I proceed by first articulating the positions of Odùwólé and Fáyemí on the philosophical problem of evil in Yorùbá thought, which I consider having certain philosophical twists. This would allow me to analyse and theoretically refute their views by drawing insights from some verses of *Ifá* literary corpus on the attributes of Olódùmarè and some other deities, thereby

clearing the cobwebs which serve as obscuring factors to our conceptualisation of the philosophical problem of evil in Yorùbá thought.

Due to the influence of colonialism on Africa and the Judeo-Christian religious system, which it was able to establish successively, some prominent African scholars like D. O. Fagunwa, Mbiti, Idowu, Odùwólé and many others have unconsciously relativised Christianity and its terminologies for it to fit into the African religious and cultural enclaves. For instance, in the Yorùbá context, such Judeo-Christian concepts as God, Satan, and Devil have been equated with some terms representing certain figures in the Yorùbá pantheon of gods. Accordingly, conceptual colonisation ensued as a lamentable by-product of colonialism. This conceptual colonisation prompted some scholars like Bọlaji Idowu, Ade Dọpamu, and Èbùn Odùwólé to argue that Olódùmarè possesses some attributes similar to those of the Judeo-Christian God. On this basis, Odùwólé argues that Olódùmarè possesses the attributes of Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnibenevolence. Accordingly, she contends that the existence of evil and suffering contradict the attributes of Olódùmarè. Besides, Odùwólé submits that the philosophical problem of evil is universal and that the Western formulation of the problem is the same in the Yorùbá thought system (Odùwólé 12).

Reacting to Odùwólé's submission, Kazeem Fáyẹmí avers that the philosophical problem of evil is not universal. He argues that evil *exists* in African thought like everywhere else, but this does not *necessarily* lead to the philosophical problem of evil in the Yorùbá philosophical thinking (Fáyẹmí 125). Fáyẹmí's reason for this submission is that once it can be proved that the reality of evil does not contradict the existence of Olódùmarè, then there is no philosophical problem of evil. For him, the main propositions that can illustrate the logical structure of the problem of evil are:

- i. Olódùmarè exists;
- ii. Olódùmarè has infinite and perfect attributes of omnipotence and omnibenevolence;
- iii. Evil exists (125).

The first and the third propositions are, according to him, incontrovertible for the Yorùbá, while the second does not represent the nature of Olódùmarè in the Yorùbá thought system as Olódùmarè is neither omnipotent nor omnibenevolent (125–126). Given this line of thought, Fáyẹmí contends that:

It is arguable and evident that none of the propositions are contradictory. Hence, there is no philosophical problem of evil in Yorùbá metaphysical thought. The philosophical problem of evil, a perennial problem in Western philosophy, is [a] non-problematic issue in traditional Yorùbá thought...the problem of evil does not therefore exist in Yorùbá thought because Olódùmarè and his divinities are said to be capable of doing both good and bad. Unlike the supreme being of the Christian religion, Olódùmarè and the other gods are never regarded as perfect beings that cannot be malevolent (125–126).

Fáyẹmí's explanation above seems to suggest that only the logical formulation of the problem of evil exists or is *philosophical*. This impression has a direct reductionistic implication for philosophy and its problems. His denial of the existence of the philosophical problem of evil in Yorùbá thought on the basis that it does not have a logical structure observable in the Western formulation appears to be an absolutist position. One wonders whether Fáyẹmí had exhaustively explored and inspected all possible *philosophical* formulations of the problem of evil and suspected that traces of any of them were absent in Yorùbá thought before he made such outright denial. As a *reductio ad absurdum*, Fáyẹmí's denial can be illustrated as follows:

- (1) only the logical formulation of the problem of evil exists;
- (2) only the logical formulation of the problem of evil is philosophical;
- (3) the logical problem of evil does not arise in Yorùbá thought;
- (4) it follows, therefore, that there is no philosophical problem of evil in Yorùbá thought.

The above seems to echo Alvin Plantinga's claim that once it can be proved *deductively* that there is no contradiction between the existence of a morally good God and the reality of evil, then all that is left of the problem of evil becomes a pastoral concern instead of a philosophical concern (Plantinga 63–64). However, this is a mistaken view as it presents a parochial impression of philosophy by philosophers of the analytic bent. Philosophy is not a discipline whose ultimate business, preoccupations and concerns are exhaustively determinable or completely wrappable in a deductive detection of contradiction. For one, the first premise above is regrettably false: there are other formulations of the problem of evil. The second premise is also false: other formulations, namely, evidential, existential, Buddhist, Stoic, and so on, are as philosophical as the logical formulation. While the third premise is true, it does not imply that other conceptions or formulations of the problem of evil in Yorùbá thought are impossible. Accordingly, the premises of the argument do not conclusively substantiate the claim.

Fáyẹmí confesses that “there is existence of evil in African thought like everywhere else but that it does not necessarily lead to the philosophical problem of evil in Yorùbá philosophical thinking” (Fáyẹmí 125). Nonetheless, the fact that the Yorùbá do not see any logical contradiction between the existence of evil and the existence of Olódùmarè does not mean that there is no philosophical problem of evil in Yorùbá thought. On the other hand, if the logical problem of evil does not arise in the Yorùbá thought system or any other thought system for that matter, it does not follow that other philosophical formulations of the problem of evil do not arise in it. In fact, Fáyẹmí unconsciously agrees with this view when he observes that the notion of evil in the Yorùbá thought system raises issues that are of metaphysical relevance like:

Why did Olódùmarè create a world with the intermediary supports of the divinities and allow the divinities to have so much power and unrestricted freedom and exercise of principalities of power to cause evil in the world? Why has Olódùmarè not created human beings in a way that the exercise of their freedom will not occasion evil at all? Why has Olódùmarè decided to introduce the concept of evil to human language, dictionary and experience? (127)

The above are some of the philosophical problems which Fáyẹmí himself raises from the notion of evil in the Yorùbá thought system. To be sure, some of the questions Fáyẹmí raises above are galvanising factors to different shades of theodicies postulated in Western, Eastern, and African philosophies. This, however, contradicts his stark denial of the philosophical problem of evil in Yorùbá thought. If the above metaphysical questions do not provoke a problem following Fáyẹmí's submission, then it follows that metaphysical issues are not philosophical issues.

It is incontrovertible that people of every culture raise these kinds and other related questions. Against this background, it seems that any attempt made by any culture to answer the enigmatic questions of existence, whether logically, existentially, metaphysically or in whichever way, is philosophical.

The Buddhist formulation of the problem of evil and human suffering, for instance, neither alludes to the existence of any known God nor aims to establish a contradiction between the attributes of a morally good God and the reality of evil. Buddhists contend that existence generally is characterised by evil. However, they attribute the origin of evil in existence to human cravings. This conception may have its shortcomings, but it remains true that it also has its strengths. It does not make any allusion to the existence or non-existence of God to explain the problem of evil and human suffering in the world. Yet, this explanation is highly philosophical.

One vital implication of the above is that the existence of God is not a necessary condition for formulating *all philosophical problems of evil*. There are many philosophical conceptions of the problem of evil, of which the logical formulation is one. Hence, other explanations, conceptions, and formulations of the problem of evil which do not refer to the existence of God or base their conceptions on the examination of the contradiction between the existence of God and the reality of evil are as philosophically valid as the logical formulation which does.

Having said the above, it is imperative to mention that Odùwólé's submission on the attributes of Olódùmarè in relation to the existence of evil does not represent what is, in fact, obtainable in Yorùbá thought. The attributes of Olódùmarè and other deities are consistent with the reality of evil. Olódùmarè is not omnipotent, omniscience or omnibenevolent as the Judea-Christian God. For this reason, the logical problem of evil, which evokes inconsistency or contradiction, does not arise in Yorùbá thought. Kólá Abimbólá (49) and Segun Ogungbemi (81–82) trace the origin of evil to the activities of the *Ajogun* (warriors against men) and contend that Èṣù and the *Àjé* (the witches) straddle the good–evil divides. Nevertheless, all deities (benevolent or malevolent) are believed to have been saddled with their respective tasks by Olódùmarè. Since Olódùmarè in Yorùbá thought, is neither absolutely good nor evil, it follows that the activities of the ministers of Olódùmarè are consistent with the attributes of the force (Olódùmarè) that saddled them with their respective tasks.

It is understandable that Odùwólé's account is based on the existing literature of African scholars on the nature of Olódùmarè. However, this is inexcusable. Before Odùwólé, Idowu (40–41) described Olódùmarè as an Omnipotent (all-powerful) and Omniscient (all-wise, all-knowing and all-seeing) being. Quoting Idowu, Mbiti (31) asserts that “it is a common saying among the Yorùbá that only God is wise and they believe that God is the discernor of hearts who sees both the inside and the outside of man.” Following these two African scholars as well, Awolalu (14–15) contends that Olódùmarè is omnipotent and omniscient.

However, the above descriptions of the attributes of Olódùmarè contradict and misrepresent *Its* nature. In Yorùbá thought, Olódùmarè is not all-powerful, in which case, it is not omnipotent. It is not all-knowing or all-wise, in which case, it is not omniscient. In addition, it is not all-good, in which case, it is not omnibenevolent. In fact, in Yorùbá thought, unlike the Western, Olódùmarè is genderless. The separation of power and duty among Olódùmarè and *Its* divinities establishes the fact that Olódùmarè is not omnipotent. Idowu (49) recognises this when he writes that:

He [Olódùmarè] has portioned out the theocratic administration of the world among the divinities whom He [It] brought into being and ordained to their several offices. By functions of these divinities, and the authority conferred upon them, they are “almighty” within certain limits. But their “almightiness” is limited and entirely subject to the absolute authority of the creator Himself [Itself].

While Idowu recognises that Olódùmarè is not almighty, he still asserts that *It* is absolute. This is contradictory. Apart from that, no evidence supports Idowu's claim that Olódùmarè brought the divinities to which it apportions authorities into existence. Instead, they are believed to have co-existed with Olódùmarè (Abimbólá 59–60). Idowu also describes Olódùmarè as “the Creator”. However, the task of creation is believed in Yorùbá thought to have been directly assigned to Ọbàtálá or Ọrìṣànlá while other divinities like Àjàlá (moulder of inner heads) and Ọ̀gún also help out in certain ways. Olódùmarè only supplies Èmí (life), which is the life principle. This means that Olódùmarè merely participates in the process of creation.

Kólá Abimbólá (*Yorùbá Culture*) contends that the relationship between Olódùmarè and the three divinities (Ọbàtálá, Èṣù, and Ifá) that co-existed with *It* can be explained by using functional and existential hierarchies. On the existential hierarchy, Olódùmarè, the ultimate reality, is supreme to other deities. However, on functional hierarchy, the three deities are supreme to Olódùmarè in their respective roles. In this sense, “the entity at the apex of the Yorùbá cosmos will depend on what issues and concerns we are interested in” (71). For instance, regarding daily activities in the cosmos, Èṣù is the supreme deity because he is the universal policeman. When it comes to creation, Ọbàtálá, Ọ̀gún, Olódùmarè and Àjàlá are involved, but Ọbàtálá is supreme; when it comes to political administration of the cosmos, Olódùmarè is supreme; when it comes to knowledge and wisdom Ọ̀rúnmìlà, also known as *Ifá*, is supreme (71–72). Based on

the functional hierarchy, therefore, Idowu, Mbiti, Awolalu and Odùwolé uphold erroneous views about the attributes of Olódùmarè. In fact, the second verse in a principal chapter of *Ifá* called *Ìwòrì Mèjì*, testifies to the supremacy of Ọ́rúnmìlà over Olódùmarè on matters relating to knowledge and wisdom thus:

Ọwọ́ èwe ò tó pẹpẹ;
 Ti àgbàlagbà ò wọ akèrègbè;
 Isẹ́ èwé bẹ́ àgbà
 Kí ó má ẹ kọ̀ mọ̀;
 Gbogbo wa ni a nísẹ́ a jọ ní bẹ́ 'raa wa;
 A díá fún Ọ́rúnmìlà,
 Èyí tí akápòò rẹ́
 Ó pè léjọ́ l'ọ̀dò Olódùmarè.
 Olódùmarè wáá ránńsẹ́ sí Ọ́rúnmìlà
 Pé kí ó wáá sọ́ ídí nàa
 Tí kò fi gbẹ́ akápòò rẹ́.
 Nígba tí Ọ́rúnmìlà dé iwájú Olódùmarè,
 Ó ní òun sa gbogbo agbára òun fún akápò,
 Ó ní ìpín akápòò ni kò gbọ́
 Nígba nàa ni ọ̀rọ́ nàa
 Tó wáá yé Olódùmarè yékéyéké;
 Inúu rẹ́ẹ́ sì dùn wí pé
 Òun kò dájọ́ eékún kan.
 Ni Èlédáá bá ní láti ọ̀jọ́ nàa ló,
 Ọmọ́ ẹ́dá kan kò gbodò dá ẹjọ́ eékún kan.
 Ànikàndájọ́, o ò ẹun;
 Ànikàndájọ́ o ò ẹ̀ẹ̀yàn;
 Nígba tí o ò gbọ́ tẹnu ọ̀nikẹ̀jì,
 Emi l'ò dájọ́ ẹ? (W. Abimbólá, *Àwọn Ojú Odù Mèjèrindínlógún* 16–17)

An adolescent's hand does not get to the ceiling;
 That of an adult does not enter the gourd;
 Whatever errand a child sends an adult,
 Let not that adult refuse again
 For we all have errands that we run for one another.
 Divination was performed for Ọ́rúnmìlà,
 Whose devotee
 Would allege before Olódùmarè
 Olódùmarè sent for Ọ́rúnmìlà
 That he should come and explain the reason
 His devotee was not prosperous in his service.
 When Ọ́rúnmìlà got to the presence of Olódùmarè,
 He said he tried his best for his devotee
 He said it was the devotee's destiny that thwarted his efforts.
 It was then that the issue
 Became very clear to Olódùmarè
 It [Olódùmarè] was then happy
 That it had not passed a biased judgement
 Then the maker said from that day onward,
 No human being should pass a biased judgement.
 Biased judges, you are not to be thanked;
 Biased judges, you are inhumane.
 When you have not heard from the other person,
 Why did you pass a judgement?

[My translation]

Apart from corroborating the separation of power among the deities, the verse above emphasises the functional structure of the hierarchy of the deities which places Ọ́rúnmílà above Olódùmarè on matters relating to knowledge and wisdom. It also shows that Olódùmarè is the Supreme Being when it comes to political administration, and that is why Ọ́rúnmílà's devotee tenders his reservations against his Ọ́rìsà (Ọ́rúnmílà) before Olódùmarè, while Olódùmarè presides over the case like a judge. This shows that Olódùmarè has its limitations and boundaries, especially when it comes to knowing. It cannot therefore be said to be omniscient, as Idowu, Mbiti, Awolalu, and Odùwólé have argued.

The philosophical problem of evil in Yorùbá thought: an existentialist conception

In this section, I shall articulate the existential nature of the problem of evil in Yorùbá thought. Previously, B. J. Balogun and A. I. Ogunyomi have written on the existential twist of the problem of evil in Yorùbá thought. However, these writings focused on discussing other issues relating to the problem of evil and their existential implications in Yorùbá thought. Accordingly, they did little in properly and systematically outlining the formulation of the problem (see B. J. Balogun 56–76; Ogunyomi 107–122). I attempt to do so here.

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that arose in Western scholarship in the 19th cum 20th centuries. However, it has its traits and traces in all the epochs of Western philosophy and the histories of human existence. The central focus of existentialism is human beings and their existential situations (Macquarries 2); hence, it applies to all human beings irrespective of their geographical locations. The reality of evil in the world is, itself, primarily an existential problem. It is against this background that I find it suitable for re-investigating the philosophical problem of evil in Yorùbá thought.

There are some Yorùbá proverbs and sayings like *tibi tire la dā ilē ayé* (the world was created both good and evil); *èniyàn kò lèè gbare, kó má gba ibi ojò kan* (human beings cannot receive good without also receiving evil in a day). These proverbs establish the existential nature of evil in the Yorùbá conceptual scheme. In other words, they emphasise the fact that both good and evil exist in the actual human world and that human beings cannot escape from both. It is to this end that Ada Agada (306) maintains that our actual world reveals evidence of both good and evil – evil does not exist in a vacuum (B. J. Balogun 66). This suggests that the notions of good and evil in relation to human beings are largely existential in nature and meaningful within the context of human experiences in existence.

Many existentialists³ have written extensively on the problem of human suffering, nothingness, absurdity, anguish, anxiety, facticities and the meaninglessness of the world.⁴ These are what can be summarily described as evil in the existentialist parlance. The existential problem of evil can therefore be formulated in the following way:

- (1) Human beings are in a world where there is evil
- (2) The presence of evil in the world positions a great hindrance to the happiness of human beings
- (3) Human beings make all efforts to make their existential situation better, thereby avoiding evil
- (4) However, evil is unavoidable, leaving human beings persistently stranded, optionless and hopeless in existence.

This situation is what Moses Ọ̀kè describes as “man's feeling of not being at home in the world where he must nonetheless have his home, and which, in fact, is his home” (Ọ̀kè 12–36). The Yorùbás are aware of the reality of both evil and good in the world and they try everything within their power to resist evil.

Segun Ogungbemi maintains that nothing is as intelligible to human beings as the understanding of their existence in relation to both life and death (Ogungbemi 82). Meanwhile, while everyone wants to live, no one wishes to be deprived of good living and the good fortunes of life (wealth, good health, marriage, children, and long life). This is precisely the case with the Yorùbá people. Hence, they make every effort to make their existence meaningful.

The efforts of human beings to make existence bearable for themselves through every possible means and the constant frustration they encounter in the attempt to do so in the face of evil is, incontrovertibly, an existentialist problem. Ogunyomi (107–122) emphasises this dilemma when he explains that despite all their efforts to avoid evil in the world, human beings are ultimately helpless in the face of evil, as no measure seems to be potent enough to entirely ward evil off from human existence.

Fáyemí (128) claims that *ire* (good) and *ibi* (evil) are not separate entities but one entity in two interdependent folds. This is not consistent with the Yorùbá understanding of the two phenomena. The Yorùbás indeed believe that the world, as we have it, is densely filled with both good and evil. However, it is not true that the Yorùbá uphold an inseparable thesis about good and evil. What we may reasonably argue for within the Yorùbá conceptual scheme, as far as good and evil are concerned, is an *inescapable* thesis. Nevertheless, the Yorùbás believe that in a world that is densely filled with good and evil, one can still *hope* to enjoy good fortune as long as one is alive and continues to make efforts towards averting evil. One does not intentionally hope for evil as human beings always want to identify with the good occurrences of nature while they always want to dissociate themselves from evil. That is why Mbiti (204) maintains that “African peoples are much aware of evil in the world, and in various ways, they endeavour to fight it”. In addition, the first verse of *Òkànràn Mèjì*, the eighth principal chapter of *Ifá*, explains how human beings always cherish and crave a good and comfortable life and how they detest a life of discomfort, characterised by evil and suffering. The verse goes thus:

Òkànràn kan yí náà, ire dé.
Ewé àjéḍfólè ní yóó fò ibi nù fún wa.
Ewé èjìnrìn wéwé ní yóó wè è dànù.
Ewé atapàrà ló ní kí ibi ó ta nù l'órí mi... (W. Abimbóla, *Àwọn Ojú Oḍu Mèrèrèrindínlógún* 46)

Òkànràn has encountered this too, here comes good fortune.

It is the leaf of *àjéḍfólè* that will take evil away from us.

It is the leaf of *èjìnrìn wéwé* that will wash it away.

The leaf of *atapàrà* says evil should bounce away from my head...⁵

[My translation]

If Fáyemí's claim were to be the case, the Yorùbá would have found it unnecessary to make efforts towards preventing or avoiding evil. However, reversed is the case because they always attempt to avoid evil through supplications, incantations, sacrifice, and prayers, as evidenced in the above verse. This is corroborated again by a supplication in the third verse of *Ògúndá Mèjì*, the seventh chapter of *Ifá*, which goes thus:

Oní lònì Onísín Ìkò;
Òlà lèlà Òbàrànmòjè
Òtunlā omọ iyá è
Bí ó wàá,
Bì ò wá, 5
Enikan ò mò.
A díá fún Òrúnmílà,
Ifá ó ràtà bọmọ è
Bí Igún Ìgẹmọ.
Èwí nílè Adó, 10
Ifá ràtà bò mí,
Ìbì pọ lóde.
Àgbàrá nìí ràtáá bo yanrìn lódò;
Ifá ràtà bòmí,
Ìbì pọ lóde. 15
Ètípón-qlá nìí ràtáá bolẹ.
Ifá ràtà bò mí,

Ibi pò lóde.
 Ìhùhù ladié fí ràtáà bọmọ ẹ,
 Ọrúnmílà ràtá bò mí, 20
 Ibi pò lóde. (W. Abimbólá, *Ìjìnlẹ̀ Ohùn Ẹnu Ifá, Apá Kejì* 104–106)

Today belongs to the king of *Ìkọ*;
 Tomorrow belongs to *Ọbàràmòjẹ*;
 The following day is like the previous.
 Whether it will come;
 Whether it will not come; 5
 No one knows.
 Divination was performed for *Ọrúnmílà*,
Ifá would protect his children
 Like the vulture of *Ìgẹmọ* town.
 High chief of the household of *Adó*, 10
Ifá protect me,
 Everywhere is full of evil out there.
 It is erosion that covers the sands of the river;
Ifá protect me,
 Everywhere is full of evil out there. 15
 It is *Ẹtípọ̀n-ọlá* that takes cover over the earth;
Ifá, take cover over me,
 Everywhere is full of evil out there.
 Fowls protect their chicks with their feathers;
Ọrúnmílà protect me, 20
 Everywhere is full of evil out there.⁶ [My translation]

This verse shows the negativity of evil and how human beings always want to avoid it. Aside from the above, several other verses in different chapters of *Ifá*, as would be shown below, describe evil as a negative and entirely separate entity from good. In addition, they describe evil as what both human beings and the deities always want to do away with, in spite of the consciousness they have about its reality and their belief about its inescapableness in existence. For instance, when Èsù informed the people of *Ìkọ̀dọ̀lọ* in the verse of *Ifá* chapter called *Ọbàrà Mèjì*, that *Àgbìgbò-nìwọ̀nràn*, the bastard son of their late king, an apprentice of Ọrúnmílà, was coming home to bury his late father with a load of evil on his head (which Ọrúnmílà himself placed upon him because of his unfaithfulness to Ọrúnmílà and his failure to make the appropriate sacrifice to Èsù and other divinities), the people trooped out to the gate of the village in order to prevent him from entering their village or dropping his load of evil. The verse describes the reaction of the people of *Ìkọ̀dọ̀lọ* to the information passed to them by Èsù as follows:

...Ni àwọn ará ọ̀de Ìkọ̀dọ̀lọ bá sa araa wọn jọ,
 Wọn múra,
 Wọn dèná de Àgbìgbò. 195
 Bí Àgbìgbò tí yọ ní ọ̀kánkán,
 Àwọn ará ọ̀de Ìkọ̀dọ̀lọ fariwo ta.
 Wọn í wí pé:
 “Ìkú lo gbé délẹ̀ yí o,
 Àwà ọ̀ rà. 200
 Àgbìgbò-nìwọ̀nràn gbẹ̀rù ẹ o;
 Gbẹ̀rù ẹ,
 Àwà ọ̀ rà.
 Àrùn lo gbé délẹ̀ yí o,
 Àwà ọ̀ rà. 205
 Àgbìgbò-nìwọ̀nràn gbẹ̀rù ẹ o;
 Gbẹ̀rù ẹ,

Àwa ò rà. Òfò lo gbé délẹ̀ yí o, Àwa ò rà. Àgbìgbò-nìwònran gbèrù ẹ o; Gbèrù ẹ, Àwàwa ò rà Ìjàmbá lo gbé délẹ̀ yí o, Àwa ò rà. Àgbìgbò-nìwònran gbèrù ẹ o; Gbèrù ẹ, Àwa ò rà. Àgbìgbò-nìwònran gbèrù ẹ o; Gbèrù ẹ, Àwa ò rà (W. Abimbólá, <i>Ìjìnṣẹ́ Ohùn Ènu Ifá, Apá Kejì</i> 57–58; see also W. Abimbólá, <i>Sixteen Great Poems of Ifá</i> 187–188).	210
...The people of <i>Ìkòḍḍò</i> therefore gathered themselves together, They got themselves well prepared, And blocked the road of <i>Àgbìgbò</i> . As soon as <i>Àgbìgbò</i> appeared from afar off, The people of <i>Ìkòḍḍò</i> started to shout. They were saying: It is death that you are carrying into this land; We will not share in it. <i>Àgbìgbò-nìwònran</i> take away your load. Take away your evil load. We will not share in it. It is disease which you are bringing into this city. We will not share in it. <i>Àgbìgbò-nìwònran</i> take away your load, Take away your evil load, We will not share in it. It is loss which you are bringing into this city, We will not share in it. <i>Àgbìgbò-nìwònran</i> take away your load, Take away your evil load, We will not share in it. It is danger which you are bringing into this city, We will not share in it. <i>Àgbìgbò-nìwònran</i> take away your load; Take away your evil load, We will not share in it. <i>Àgbìgbò-nìwònran</i> take away your load; Take away your evil load, We will not share in it.	195 200 205 210 215 220
[Wándé Abimbólá's translation]	

The reaction of the people of *Ìkòḍḍò*, as illustrated in the above *Ifá* verse, shows how strongly the Yorùbá believe that evil is negative and that it should always be resisted while good is positive and should always be craved by human beings. The sixth verse of *Ọ̀wònín Méjì* also attests to this thus:

Ọ̀rúnmílà ní ó ní dún yunmuyunmu,
Ó ní kún yunmuyunmu
L'órí àpáta àgbàrànsaala.
Wón ní ta ní ní dún yunmuyunmu,
Tí ní kún yunmuyunmu

L'óri àpáta àgbàrànsaala?
 Wọn ní ajé l'ó ní dún yunmuyunmu,
 Ajé l'ó ní kùn yunmuyunmu
 L'óri àpáta àgbàrànsaala.
 Ọrúnmílà ní ẹ sílẹ̀kùn f'ọlójó rere, 10
 K'ó wọlé wá.
 Ọrúnmílà ní ní dún yunmuyunmu,
 Ó ní kùn yunmuyunmu
 L'óri àpáta àgbàrànsaala.
 Wọn ní kìn ní ní dún yunmuyunmu, 15
 Tí ní kùn yunmuyumu
 L'óri àpáta àgbàrànsaala?
 Wọn ní aya ní ní dún yunmuyunmu,
 Aya ní ní kùn yunmuyunmu
 L'óri àpáta àgbàrànsaala. 20
 Ọrúnmílà ní ẹ sílẹ̀kùn f'ọlójó rere,
 K'ó wọlé wá.
 Ọrúnmílà ní ó ní dún yunmuyunmu,
 Ó ní kùn yunmuyunmu
 L'óri àpáta àgbàrànsaala. 25
 Wọn ní kìn ní ní dún yunmuyunmu,
 Tí ní kùn yunmuyumu
 L'óri àpáta àgbàrànsaala?
 Ọrúnmílà ní ọmọ ní ní dún yunmuyunmu,
 Ọmọ ní ní kùn yunmuyunmu 30
 L'óri àpáta àgbàrànsaala.
 Ọrúnmílà ní ẹ sílẹ̀kùn f'ọlójó rere,
 K'ó wọlé wá.

Ọrúnmílà ní ní dún yunmuyunmu,
 Ó ní kùn yunmuyunmu 35
 L'óri àpáta àgbàrànsaala.
 Wọn ní kìn ní ní dún yunmuyunmu,
 Tí ní kùn yunmuyumu
 L'óri àpáta àgbàrànsaala?
 Wọn ní ikú ní ní dún yunmuyunmu, 40
 Ikú ní ní kùn yunmuyunmu
 L'óri àpáta àgbàrànsaala.
 Ọrúnmílà ní ewée didímọ̀nísàayùn,
 Ní yóò ẹ̀ ikú nàà fún òun.
 Ọrúnmílà ní ewée didímọ̀nísàayùn 45
 Ní yóò ẹ̀ àrùn nàà fún òun,
 Ní yóò ẹ̀ òfò, ẹ̀gbà, ẹ̀sẹ nàà fún òun.
 Ọrúnmílà ní ewée didímọ̀nísàayùn
 Ní yóò ẹ̀ gbogbo Ajogun nàà fún òun.
 Ọrúnmílà, Bara, Àgbọ̀nmìrẹ̀gún, 50
 Ng ò pé o òdínà ire. (W. Abimbólá, *Àwọn Ojú Odù Mèrẹ̀rìndínlógún* 36)

Ọrúnmílà says it is very near,
 It is closely at hand
 On the rock of àgbàrànsaala.
 They ask what is very near,
 What is closely at hand 5
 On the rock of àgbàrànsaala?
 They say it is prosperity that is very near,
 It is prosperity that is closely at hand

On the rock of <i>àgbàrànsaala</i> .	
<i>Òrúnmìlà</i> says open the door for it	10
That the good fortune, owner of the day may come in.	
<i>Òrúnmìlà</i> says it is very near,	
It is closely at hand	
On the rock of <i>àgbàrànsaala</i> .	
They ask what is very near,	15
What is closely at hand	
On the rock of <i>àgbàrànsaala</i> ?	
They say it is the good of wife that is very near,	
It is the good of wife that is closely at hand	
On the rock of <i>àgbàrànsaala</i> .	20
<i>Òrúnmìlà</i> says open the door for it	
That the good fortune, owner of the day may come in.	
<i>Òrúnmìlà</i> says it is very near,	
It is closely at hand	
On the rock of <i>àgbàrànsaala</i> .	25
They ask what is very near,	
What is closely at hand	
On the rock of <i>àgbàrànsaala</i> ?	
<i>Òrúnmìlà</i> says it is the good of children that is very near,	
It is the good of children that is closely at hand	30
On the rock of <i>àgbàrànsaala</i> .	
<i>Òrúnmìlà</i> says open the door for it	
That the good fortune, owner of the day may come in.	
<i>Òrúnmìlà</i> says it is imminent,	
It is closely at hand	35
On the rock of <i>àgbàrànsaala</i> .	
They ask what is imminent,	
What is closely at hand	
On the rock of <i>àgbàrànsaala</i> ?	
They say it is death that is imminent,	40
It is death that is closely at hand	
On the rock of <i>àgbàrànsaala</i> .	
<i>Òrúnmìlà</i> says the leaf of <i>didimọ̀nísààyùn</i>	
Will shut the door of death for him.	
<i>Òrúnmìlà</i> says the leaf of <i>didimọ̀nísààyùn</i>	45
Will also shut the door of diseases for him;	
It will shut the doors of loss, paralysis and affliction for him.	
<i>Òrúnmìlà</i> says the leaf of <i>didimọ̀nísààyùn</i>	
Will shut the doors of all the <i>Ajogun</i> for him.	
<i>Òrúnmìlà</i> , <i>Bara</i> , <i>Àgbọ̀nmùrẹ̀gún</i> ,	50
I did not ask you to shut the door of good fortune. ⁷	[My translation]

The above verse explains the binary relationship between good and evil in Yorùbá thought. However, it explains how evil and good can come together without one being necessarily present in the other in that one can be claimed while the other can be rejected. Òrúnmìlà, in the above verse, substantiates the difference between good and evil and that human beings always aspire to possess all good fortune that will make existence comfortable for them even when they are not oblivious of the enormity of evil present in human existence. This supports our position that the reality of evil, far from being a logical problem, is an existential problem in Yorùbá thought. It makes it evident that evil constitutes a significant obstruction to the desires of human beings for good fortune in existence.

The Yorùbá saying: *ire ñ bẹ nínú ibi; ibi ñ bẹ nínú ire* (there is good in evil; there is evil in good) merely points to the fact that evil can emerge or be perpetrated in guise of good and good can emerge or be perpetrated in guise of good. Again, the saying *nínú ìkòkò dúdú l'ẹ̀kọ́ funfun ti jáde* (white corn-pap comes out of black pots) has a largely contextual meaning. For instance, it may mean that morally wanting parents can produce and raise morally worthy children. It does not strictly imply that once there is good, evil must be present in it or that when there is evil, good must be present in it. Accordingly, the Yorùbá thought system provokes an existential problem of evil which is as philosophical as the logical problem of evil. It is philosophical in the sense that human beings find themselves in situations and circumstances that negate their aspirations and expectations in existence. They struggle so hard through various means to escape from these situations. However, the efforts of human beings to escape from their existential concerns prove abortive in the final analysis, which leaves them stranded before their problems and makes the question: "what is the meaning and essence of human existence?" seemingly unsatisfactorily answerable.

Yet, the Yorùbás believe that total surrenderness to defeat or relapse to the darkness of pessimism is unacceptable: human beings must strive continuously to make their existence meaningful.¹⁸ Now, to argue that this is not philosophical is to embrace a restrictive conception of philosophy that valorises logic and analyticity as ultimate paradigms of "philosophicality" and "problematicity". As I have argued earlier, this view imposes a conceptual constraint on the philosophical problem of evil. It is therefore misleading.

The existential problem of evil deals with the concrete experience of human beings as they grapple with and react to the facticities that characterise their existence and the very urgent need to make meaning out of those facticities. However, the logical problem of evil remains in the abstract realm of conceptual analysis and argumentation – far removed from the concrete experiential conditions of human beings – placing its most invaluable priority on the establishment of consistency and inconsistency – an exercise which has no serious effect or profound impact on the practical lives of human beings as they grapple with the facticities of life such as illness, diseases, deformities, loss, curse, trouble, imprisonment, death – in short, the inconveniences – that densely characterise the real world of human beings.

Conclusion

In the above, I discussed the controversies surrounding the conception of the *philosophical* problem of evil in Yorùbá thought, specifically between Odùwólé and Fáyẹmí. I explained some contentions and misconceptions of the *philosophical* problem of evil in relation to Olódùmaré and *Its* divinities in Yorùbá thought by some African scholars. However, by drawing some insights from several verses of *Ifá* chapters, I refuted the position that the Yorùbá thought system is oblivious to the philosophical problem of evil simply because the logical formulation of the problem that raises the questions of inconsistency and incompatibility is absent from it. I uphold the position that those who embrace this view have a parochial and reductionistic understanding of the philosophical problem of evil. This is because there are other conceptions of evil that are as philosophically substantial as the logical conception. I discussed the problem of evil in Yorùbá thought from the existentialist perspective and drew insights from several verses of *Ifá* to substantiate my argument and provide a theoretical refutation of the positions of Odùwólé and Fáyẹmí on the *philosophical* problem of evil in Yorùbá thought.

Notes

- ¹ A few notable examples are Idowu (*Olódùmarè*), Mbiti (*African Religions and Philosophy*), Awolalu (*Yorùbá Belief and Sacrificial Rites*), Bewaji ('Olódùmarè'), Dọpamu (*Esu*), Odùwólé ('The dialectics of ire (goodness) and ibi (evilness)'), A. O. Balogun ('The nature of evil and human wickedness in traditional African thought'), Oshitelu (2010), Fáyẹmí ('Ire and Ibi'), Igboine ('Èṣù and the problem of evil'), and J. B. Balogun J. B. ('Ibi').
- ² See Fáyẹmí ('Ire and Ibi') and Igboin ('Èṣù and the Problem of Evil').
- ³ Albert Camus, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Friedman, Martin Heidegger, John Macquarries, and a host of others.
- ⁴ Macquarries (4) explains that philosophers from Kierkegaard to Heidegger and Sartre sought to show that these notions are not without significance for philosophy. Karl Jaspers is another existentialist whose position is compelling. His idea of the "limit-situations" the "five antinomies of human existence which are: death, guilt, suffering, strife, and chance is all-encompassing. It captures the various notions of different existentialists like Kierkegaard, whose concentration is on sickness, fallenness and death; Dostoevsky, whose concern is with the natural wickedness of human beings, above which he exonerates bestial cruelty; Sartre, whose emphasis is on nothingness and meaninglessness; Heidegger, whose emphasis is on facticities, thrownness, abandonment and death; and Albert Camus, whose focus is on death, suicide, and the unending toil of human beings in existence – the Sisyphean stone – against which he recommends a rebellion.
- ⁵ *Àjẹ̀òfòlè*, *Ejìn-rìn wẹwẹ*, and *Atapàrà* are all leaves that are believed to bear potent protective powers against misfortunes.
- ⁶ *Ètípòn-ọlá* is a leguminous plant that spreads over the earth.
- ⁷ *Bara* and *Àgbòn-mìrègún*, are names of *Ọ̀rúnmilà*. The rock of *àgbàrànsaala* is believed to be where the witches and the deities made a series of covenants. It is also understood as the earth or the world. *Dídímọ̀nísàayùn* is a leaf that is believed to possess protective power against misfortune and evil.
- ⁸ Ogunyomi (107-122) discusses in detail the strandedness and optionlessness encountered by human beings due to the abortiveness of the measures prescribed in the Yorùbá thought system for suppressing evil.

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Does Eboussi Boulaga Criticize Marcien Towa? Setting the Stage for a Discussion from the Preface to *Muntu in Crisis*

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Abstract: This article sets out to initiate and foster a posthumous, critical, and constructive dialogue between two celebrated French-speaking (African) philosophers of the 20th century, namely Marcien Towa (1931–2014) and Fabien Eboussi Boulaga (1934–2018). It seeks to compensate for the historical absence of such a conversation, particularly on Eboussi Boulaga's part, by carefully scrutinizing and challenging the common belief that the latter criticizes Marcien Towa in his book *Muntu in Crisis*. Drawing on the preface to this book, the article turns its back on unproductive assumptions and hasty generalizations, thus revealing its quintessence, namely to follow a rigorous method that avoids assuming immediate agreement, unintelligence, or disbelief from either party.

Keywords: philosophy, fetishism, alienation, ethnophilosophy, dialectics

Das Barbarische ist das Buchstäbliche.
The literal is barbaric.

Theodor W. Adorno

Introductory Remarks

There seems to be a conventional, tacit, or otherwise unsubstantiated agreement that Fabien Eboussi Boulaga criticizes Marcien Towa in his book *Muntu in Crisis*. Surprisingly enough, this agreement seems so powerful and authoritative that no one has ever considered it worth delving into a thoughtful examination of this matter, thus securing the pervasiveness of this view. Unfortunately, I ignore who and when started this trend, but to my knowledge, one of the most relevant evocations of this situation is a statement by Norman Ajari, who wrote that Eboussi Boulaga opposes Towa's "voluntarism" (Ajari, "Née du désastre" 125)¹ whereby the latter invites "Africans to imitate the colonizer where they were strongest" (125), namely in possessing science and technology that the native of Endama identifies as Europe's "secret," precisely the secret of their domination on non-European people, including African ones. Yves Akoa Bassong's views seem to align with Ajari's. In a recent piece, he also contends that Eboussi Boulaga opposes Towa's thought, which Akoka Bassong considers as a critical overcoming of ethnophilosophy but with a straightforward adoption of Western philosophy, particularly Hegelianism. Akoka writes that in this regard, Towa's imperative of self-liberation ends up being an imperative of "self-alienation, as long as the reference to the West is maintained" (Akoka Bassong 80. My translation). From there, he concludes, "This is why Eboussi Boulaga sees Towa's philosophy as a form of institutionalized philosophy in which colonial reason is strongly implicated" (80).²

It is therefore believed that Eboussi Boulaga's analysis in *Muntu in Crisis* follows a tripartite argumentation that the structure of the book supposedly corroborates. In the first part, Eboussi Boulaga exposes the system of ethnophilosophy, focusing on its goals and method. In the second, he criticizes the criticism traditionally addressed to ethnophilosophy by showing how it mainly supposes and conforms to an ideological concept of philosophy that ultimately legitimizes European domination.³ Finally, in the third part, Eboussi Boulaga offers suggestions on how to overcome the crisis he presented as affecting both ethnophilosophers and their (ideological) critics. Now, because Marcien Towa is, with Paulin Hountondji, one of the earliest and fiercer critics of ethnophilosophy, and because, on the other hand, Fabien Eboussi Boulaga uses a terminology—some “talking points”—that is commonly associated with Towa's argument in his *Essai sur la problématique philosophique dans l'Afrique actuelle*, it is believed that Eboussi Boulaga opposes Marcien Towa, even though he never explicitly mentions his name.⁴

This article sets out the initial arguments introducing the meticulous scrutiny of this situation. It provides a detailed explanation of why such views rest on a misreading of both Eboussi Boulaga and Towa. As such, it expands on Norman Ajari's reserved but crucial remark that, on the question of the nature and goals of philosophy, Eboussi Boulaga is “closer to his compatriot Marcien Towa” (125).⁵ When taken seriously, this substantial closeness nullifies the possibility of a substantial disagreement between the two.⁶

The study follows two simple steps. First, in sections 1 and 2, I discuss Eboussi Boulaga's relationship to Marcien Towa, as illustrated in the preface⁷ to *Muntu in Crisis*.⁸ I precisely analyze, in turn, the two cases in which Eboussi Boulaga allegedly argues against Marcien Towa by shedding light on the “talking points” that supposedly relate to the latter. This analysis allows me to demonstrate how evidence drawn from this text does not support the claim that Eboussi Boulaga criticizes Marcien Towa. Section 3 then turns to the second step of the argument. I show how evidence drawn from the preface to Eboussi Boulaga's book supports an apparent filiation between him and Marcien Towa. In fact, as Eboussi Boulaga's claims of filiation are a rarity in *Muntu in Crisis*, this explicit reference is of the utmost interest in appreciating the book's orientation and what such a positioning entails regarding Marcien Towa. In organizing my argument this way, my demonstration runs backward from Eboussi Boulaga's exposition.

Eboussi Boulaga's Alleged Criticisms: Case One

Exposition

The first case of alleged criticism against Marcien Towa occurs toward the end of the sixth paragraph of the preface to *Muntu in Crisis* when Eboussi Boulaga, in an openly critical vein, writes that, from the perspective of a fetishized concept of philosophy at work in dominated societies—but not only—“To say that philosophy is Western is a pure pleonasm. That being the case, one must do the only philosophy that deserves such a name. One must renounce oneself and die to oneself in order to be reborn to the truth” (Eboussi Boulaga, *La crise du Muntu* 8/Eboussi Boulaga, *Muntu in Crisis* 2). The critical intent of these remarks is specified and confirmed by the opening sentence of the seventh paragraph. Eboussi Boulaga contends: “Such a language is that of satisfaction, which is the misfortune that ignores itself” (8/2).

Anyone somewhat familiar with Marcien Towa's 1971 essay would remember that he seemingly uses this terminology when he suggests a “new orientation for philosophy in Africa.” Towa precisely writes: “[T]o assert and to assume itself, the self must deny itself, deny its essence, and therefore also its past. By thus breaking with its essence and its past, the self must expressly aim to become like the other, similar to the other, and thereby incolonizable by the other” (Towa, *Essai sur la problématique philosophique dans l'Afrique actuelle* 42).⁹ He goes on writing that “The option is therefore unequivocal: deny oneself, question the very being of the

self, and become fundamentally Europeanized" (45). It is thus a matter of 'intellectual reflexes'—so to speak—to think that Marcien Towa is the author who is secretly targeted behind Eboussi Boulaga's phrasing—the so-called "talking points." Unfortunately, what this claim ignores or fails to acknowledge is the respective contexts of Eboussi Boulaga's and Towa's words—the contexts of those "points."

Remarks on Eboussi Boulaga's Side

Eboussi Boulaga's context is that of the preface to his book, an essential aspect of which—undoubtedly Hegelian in this respect—is generally overlooked. Indeed, Eboussi Boulaga distinguishes between "what is really at stake" (Eboussi Boulaga, *La crise du Muntu* 7/Eboussi Boulaga, *Muntu in Crisis* 1) behind "the African claim to possess philosophies," namely "the desire to attest a contested or endangered humanity and to be by- and for-oneself, through the articulation of having and doing, according to an order that excludes violence and arbitrariness" (7/1) from what is concretely generally achieved in the debate concerning African philosophy, whether by ethnophilosophers or their ideological critics, as both suppose and promote a fetishized concept of philosophy.¹⁰ What Eboussi Boulaga presents as "what is really at stake" is what, according to him, philosophy tends to mean and signify, when performed as a liberating practice, an "active project." When this project of doing philosophy—and this is what Eboussi Boulaga claims to be showing—is "naïvely undertaken [it] masks and distorts this desire, preventing it from becoming an active project" (7/1). And what "masks and distorts this desire" is fetishism.

Fetishism (type 1) appears as an attitude resulting from a confusion of species. When philosophy tends to designate any activity related to culture, and the desire mentioned above fuels the quest for its existence in dominated societies, its attestation tends to take the form of an apologetic discourse that commands submission to what is. According to Eboussi Boulaga, this is the *raison d'être* of rhetoric in establishing and sustaining the system of ethnophilosophy. Fetishism (type 2) then appears mainly as a response to this previous situation, precisely as the blindness to the conditions by which a philosophical discourse establishes itself as philosophical. This blindness also touches on the ambitions such a discourse harbors. Transposed into the context of the critique of the first form of fetishism, it fails to account for the conditions of formation and exercise of philosophy regarding domination. Eboussi Boulaga mostly calls this second type of fetishism *ideology*.

In any case, fetishism sanctions, in Eboussi Boulaga's analysis, the inability to acknowledge the interrelatedness of philosophy and history and to relate to philosophy as a *historical product*. The failure to acknowledge philosophy as a historical product results in the sanctification of domination, to its more or less reflexive, more or less tactical, sustenance and perpetuation. Fetishism therefore occurs whenever and wherever philosophy and domination are allies. The "dominated society of Africa" (8/2) offers one instance of this picture. There, "philosophy is an attribute of power. Now, it is the West that holds (and distributes) it. There is no philosophy unless associated with power, with mastery" (8/2). The conjunction of these factors—ideologically, the fascination for the master, and the practical reasons for this fascination, namely science, industry, and technology—establishes philosophy as a forever foreign practice, even when performed at home. At home, philosophy is, indeed, "the dominating difference made thought" (8).¹¹ From this, it follows that "To say that philosophy is Western is a pure pleonasm. That being the case, one must do the only philosophy that deserves such a name. One must renounce oneself and die to oneself in order to be reborn to the truth."

What, then, is this truth to which the Muntu—essentially—must be reborn? From the preceding, the answer is somewhat crystal clear: it is the inescapability of Western domination, which translates, by means of conversion, into the irremediability of African (broadly non-Western) subjugation. Nothing could be further from the mind of Marcien Towa, and here, too, the

misunderstanding concerns the failure to accurately relate Towa's words to their context. What follows is merely an outline of the latter.¹²

Remarks on Towa's Side

To begin with, I hope no one would dispute that Towa shares with Eboussi Boulaga the fundamental objective of "reflecting on the conditions, for the [African person], to emancipate themselves from the burdens of colonial and postcolonial reason to achieve the full expression of their humanity" (Kavwahirehi 160. My translation).

Secondly, it is worth recalling Towa's methodological commitment, namely dialectics, or more precisely Hegel-inspired positive dialectics,¹³ in which the end of the dialectical process is already posited at its beginning and only reappears, after some helpful negative turbulences, as the restatement—however improved—of what was already there initially. And what *is there initially*, according to Towa, is the underlying humanity—and thus the liberty—of the African person, unfortunately obscured by the vicissitudes of colonial reason. In Towa, like in Hegel, self-alienation is merely a means to an end, not the end of the process they describe, that end being self-affirmation. The primacy of the self over the other it encounters in alienating itself¹⁴ is affirmed and reaffirmed throughout Towa's essay. Still, not everyone has taken the trouble to consider his argument carefully. Speaking of this dialectics and its subject (the self), Towa (*Essai* 39) writes, for example, that "The desire to *be ourselves*, to *assume our destiny*, ultimately leads *us* to the need to transform *ourselves* in depth, to deny our innermost being in order to become the other" (My emphasis). And by becoming the other, that is, by alienating itself, the self recovers from the alienation imposed on it because it finds, expressed in the other, what it has been looking for: the full expression of itself in its freedom. Towa expresses this dialectical movement of self-affirmation *through* self-negation more explicitly when he writes:

To appropriate Europe's secret—a new, foreign spirit—we must revolutionize our own [spirit] from top to bottom. In doing so, we certainly become like the Europeans. But *in a more fundamental sense*, we become *like our ancestors* by becoming once again as they must have been in the highest periods of their history: *creative and free* (48. My emphasis).

The failure to identify self-alienation for what it is, namely a means to an end in Towa's dialectics of the self, is the shortcoming by which one can associate these words in the preface to *Muntu in Crisis* to Towa's argument—even when they postulate the objectivity of some "talking points." Indeed, as noted by Nsamenang (109. My translation), what is needed here is a "better handling of dialectics."

Finally, Towa does not understand European philosophy naively, and three primary considerations speak in his favor. With regard to history, Towa is aware that philosophy, as a set of aptitudes, is a historical phenomenon that is not tied by nature to European reality: philosophy is precisely part of a culture.¹⁵ As such, it has been established historically—meaning it has been acquired—by a particular and consistent way of being and doing. In emphasizing this point, Towa reveals how far he is from identitarian and ontological understandings of his views on the nature of philosophy and other related activities such as science and technology. Indeed, Towa writes that it is "historically" and not by a fact of nature that philosophy established itself as "the matrix of the scientific and technical universe" (Towa, *Essai* 7). The mastery it confers on the European is therefore acquired and presents itself as the result of a specific doing. Philosophy is not a gift from nature, and Europe does not possess it intrinsically, as it is naturally part of its concept or culture.¹⁶ This assumption was at the basis of colonial ideology and the colonial fascination for the master it brings in its wake. And Towa, to be sure, was aware of this.¹⁷ Therefore, ruining colonial ideology will mean, in his work, opposing the assumption of a natural link between Europe and philosophy. This is achieved only through a historical approach to the concept of philosophy that departs from the principles of colonial education—what Eboussi

Boulaga calls the “School.”¹⁸ And when this is done, the connection between philosophy and domination becomes evident.

A second consideration relates to the nature of philosophy, particularly concerning non-European people and societies. Here, it is worth noting that Marcien Towa never understands this relationship as free of domination. There is no doubt that he is aware of the “prejudice” (5) by which philosophy, considered a European and broadly Western discipline, is viewed—mainly by Europeans themselves—as a domain that is “definitively off-limits to Africans” (5), to the extent that “the African who wants to talk about philosophy or science is seen as meddling in something that is none of their business” (5). Therefore, defining philosophy and its domain is not a naïve endeavor, only concerned with academic knowledge. What is actually at stake here is domination and its justification because “The dominant ideas of the West, insofar as they concern us, are also the ideas of its domination over us” (23). In other words, like Eboussi Boulaga, Towa contends that “philosophy is an attribute of power.” In turn, the claim to possess philosophy is an act of resistance against this domination,¹⁹ by which Africans—but not only—engaged in the process of “ruining an essential argument of imperialist ideology” (25). In a sense, their objective, what is “really at stake” in their enterprise, is “the desire to attest a contested or endangered humanity and to be by- and for-oneself, through the articulation of having and doing, according to an order that excludes violence and arbitrariness.” By noting what the African claim to possess philosophies hides—the fascination of philosophy as an attribute of power—and reveals—the opposition to Western domination—Marcien Towa proves that his argument does not fall within the scope of Eboussi Boulaga’s criticisms because he is attentive to the concrete conditions by which the discourse that calls itself philosophy has come to signify within European (Western) culture and, furthermore, in relation to non-Westerners, especially toward—which here primarily means against—Africans. But there is more.

This lucid relationship to (European) philosophy—this is the third consideration—is not a view of the mind. It is evidenced, for example, by how Marcien Towa convokes and discusses European philosophers in his *Essai*. Contrary to the view Eboussi Boulaga castigates, Towa never adopts the fetishist stance of opting for an “uncritical embrace” of philosophy as practiced in school. When Towa does not firmly repudiate European theoreticians, he embraces them critically and cautiously, following his commitment to dialectics. Towa’s *Essai* illustrates such a relation to (European) philosophy on three levels when the author discusses, in turn, Georges Gusdorf, Martin Heidegger, and Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, whom he presents—I doubt this list was meant to be exhaustive—under the (uncritical?) label of “guardians of Western orthodoxy” (10). According to Marcien Towa, these philosophers are “guardians of Western orthodoxy” because they all tend to explain and justify Europe’s supremacy and domination over non-European people by arguing for European exceptionalism with regard to philosophy, science, and technology. All these authors indeed explain why Europe was either destined or justified in dominating the world and why Europeans were right to do so.

Drawing on the distinction between myth and philosophy, Gusdorf, for example, considers that the latter is an exclusive privilege of the West. In this respect, Western societies are not only different but, moreover, superior to primitive, that is, non-European societies. The reason is simple: while European and broadly Western societies were able to liberate themselves from the mythical world, non-European societies, primitive in this regard, are incapable of doing so on their own. As such, they are, as they were, trapped in the mythical world, whereas the transition from this world to that of philosophy is, in the highest sense, what defines and exemplifies the entry into the human realm.

I must warn the reader that this reading of Gusdorf should not be taken for granted, for in interpreting Gusdorf, Towa takes some important shortcuts, the most severe being the radicalization, for his own purposes, of the distance Gusdorf establishes between myth and philoso-

phy. However, it is not the question here to discuss whether or not Marcien Towa's reading of Gusdorf is accurate or to what extent it is. The point is elsewhere. It lies precisely in knowing whether Towa embraces Gusdorf uncritically, and the answer is negative. While Towa concurs with Gusdorf that myth and philosophy are separate activities,²⁰ he nonetheless departs from the underlying assumptions and the outcomes of this theory, of which he is suspicious and doubtful. Towa identifies the underlying assumptions of Gusdorf's theory as that of colonial ethnology and its main sociopolitical outcome as the "absolution for colonial brutalities and massacres" (12). On these two points, he clearly rejects Gusdorf because of the connection his approach to philosophy establishes between philosophy and Western power in relation to non-Europeans. In short, Towa understands Gusdorf's conditions of philosophy as the rationalization of a prejudice against non-European people by which philosophy proves to be, as Eboussi Boulaga puts it, "the dominating difference made thought."

Focusing solely on his *Essai*, the fair-minded reader discovers that this critical relationship with (European) philosophy not only concerns Gusdorf but also Heidegger—whom Towa abhors (13–14)—and Hegel—whose treatment is similar to Gusdorf's but in greater length (15–22 and 61–67). In any event, Towa, who never considers (European) philosophy from an uncritical point of view, never abstracts its functioning in dominated societies from its domination intent and content. The embrace of philosophy he recommends is therefore critical: first, it accounts for this situation, and second, it orients philosophy toward emancipation. As such, the method at work in Towa's writings is not the mimicry of (European) philosophy—as some lazy and partisan commentators have contended—but its reprise, which ultimately aims at self-recapture.

With this, we have covered the whole dialectical path that brings us back to the beginning of this section, where we once again find the same fundamental objective of "reflecting on the conditions, for the [African person], to emancipate themselves from the burdens of colonial and postcolonial reason to achieve the full expression of their humanity." Towa expresses this objective in an even simpler but no less captivating formula when he writes that, defetishized,²¹ the concept of European philosophy "directly encounters the very meaning of our project: a free Africa in a liberated world" (68). So much for this first case.

Eboussi Boulaga's Alleged Criticisms: Case Two

Exposition

It is usual—"common sense," one might say—to consider the occurrences of the term 'secret' in *Muntu in Crisis* as pieces of evidence of Eboussi Boulaga's critical allusions to Marcien Towa since in his *Essai*, the latter refers very early on to science and technology as the "secret" of Europe's power and domination over the rest of the world. At the same time, he asserts that philosophy played the role of "matrix of the scientific-technical universe" (7), that is to say, the secret of this secret.

In the preface to *Muntu in Crisis*, Eboussi Boulaga uses these same "talking points" to qualify philosophy as an expression of Western power, of Western strength. This way of presenting philosophy is for the author the occasion to point out the naïveté and danger of receiving this notion as a pure phenomenon, free of concrete issues consolidated in the West and relative to the function of domination: in short, forged in what the author calls the "School."²² Eboussi Boulaga writes:

Such a language is that of satisfaction, which is the misfortune that ignores itself. It is obtained by blocking the desire to be by-and-for-oneself and by the emptiness of a form without content, of an abstract universality. The language is that of servility and self-negation, and at the same time that of the tyranny of a power without finality. Philosophy, then, is merely the shadow cast by industrial society; unless it is its 'quintessence,' the secret of its secret, the secret of its strength. Philosophy

yields to magic, which believes it possesses reality by extracting its 'virtue' and quintessence, which wants to take possession of things by possessing their signs (8/2-3).

Remarks

It should be remembered that, among other goals, the preface also offers the reader an overview of the argument and division of Eboussi Boulaga's book. In the seventh paragraph, where the term 'secret' appears for the first time in reference to (Western) philosophy, Eboussi Boulaga explains the central axis of the second part of his book, in contrast to, but also in continuity with its first part. Schematically, and I am simplifying to the extreme, the first part of *Muntu in Crisis* depicts the system of ethnophilosophy with an emphasis on the concept of philosophy understood in such a way that it encompasses African culture to the point of being naturally incorporated into it. The use of rhetoric in African ethnophilosophical discourses reflects the need to establish and justify both similitude and difference with Western philosophies considered a standard. This endeavor misses the concepts of Africa and philosophy for the same reason, namely ontology. The second stance examined, and thus criticized by Eboussi Boulaga in the second part of his book can be presented as the attempt to overcome the ethnophilosophical discourse through a very similar fetishism of philosophy that recommends "the adoption, without suspicion nor doubt, of philosophy, as it is practiced in School, as it has become in the West" (Eboussi Boulaga, *La crise du Muntu* 8/Eboussi Boulaga, *Muntu in Crisis* 2).²³ The two situations proceed from antinomic extremisms that nonetheless rejoin in the same flaws regarding the capacity of a lucid appreciation of philosophy. For the Muntu who claims philosophy for their own sake and who sees it expressed in each of their cultural manifestations is blind to the concrete conditions by which a discourse that claims philosophical characterization for itself emerges as such. A similar blindness is at work on the part of the Muntu²⁴ who argues against their fellows that they are doing improper philosophy and therefore urges them to align to what is properly this discipline, namely the Western discourse that bears that name. Whether in the first or second case, philosophy exerts the same fascination on the Muntu or whoever comes into contact with it from an uncritical perspective. This fascination takes the form of fetishism. To be sure, here, Eboussi Boulaga is not saying anything different from what he has said earlier on in the preface when distinguishing between the fetishized and defetishized concepts of philosophy, and we have already shown how Marcien Towa's concept of philosophy does not correspond to Eboussi Boulaga's understanding of fetishism. The only refinement to be made to what has been said in the previous section of this article is thus the following.

While type 1 fetishism relates exclusively to the ethnophilosophical enterprise it describes, is it not necessary that type 2 fetishism relates exclusively to the criticism of ethnophilosophy. However, it is clear that the most striking manifestation of this second fetishism of philosophy occurs on the occasion of the condemnation of ethnophilosophy (85/81-2).²⁵ What is decisive in this second case is the fetishism of philosophy rather than the criticism of ethnophilosophy, that is, the nature of the concept of philosophy that one uses to describe or qualify Africa's relationship to the West and, ultimately, Africa's and the West's relationships to themselves. As far as this aspect of Eboussi Boulaga's criticism is concerned, there is no need for him to refer to a real detractor of ethnophilosophy who is *out there*. The reason for this is utterly simple: Eboussi Boulaga speaks of a general situation. Put differently, someone does not need to criticize ethnophilosophy for maintaining and exhibiting a fetishized relationship with philosophy. On this point, Hubert Vincent (105) proves to be more perceptive than many readers, as he rightly highlights that in the second part of *Muntu in Crisis*, Eboussi Boulaga does not *attack* the detractors of ethnophilosophy but instead criticizes the naïve conception of philosophy which, perceiving the Western becoming of this discipline as a universal fact, fails to notice that this very term *universal* applied to the *particular* Western becoming of philosophy actually speaks the language of "The Symbolism of Domination." Where this naïve—"abstract," writes

Eboussi Boulaga—view coincides with the presuppositions of an actual foe of ethnophilosophy, then Eboussi Boulaga’s criticisms apply to the latter, but this is not necessary from the outset²⁶ because even without real authors to whom the book would specifically refer, Eboussi Boulaga’s criticisms are capable of, and must therefore be considered as standing on their own, especially in the absence of an explicit reference—which, again, is by no means necessary considering the book’s argument.²⁷

As a result, it is not necessary that Eboussi Boulaga explicitly refers to someone when he speaks of philosophy as the “secret of the secret” or the “secret of the strength” of the West.²⁸ Nor is it necessary for him to refer to Marcien Towa, and whoever sees a necessary relationship between those words and the Master of Endama—even considered under the obscure category of “talking points”—succumbs to the fetishism denounced by Eboussi Boulaga because they conceive of these expressions in an *abstract* manner that ignores the conditions of time, place, mode, relation, and object, in a word the *context* in which they are produced within the frameworks of Eboussi Boulaga’s and Marcien Towa’s philosophical arguments. The context, once again, invalidates any attempt to relate Marcien Towa to what Eboussi Boulaga is contesting. Moreover, instead of merely disproving the claim that Eboussi Boulaga criticizes Towa by providing negative evidence against this hypothesis, the preface to *Muntu in Crisis* offers the reader unambiguous positive evidence to support the contrary claim.

Indeed, although Eboussi Boulaga never mentions Marcien Towa as an adversary,²⁹ he does mention him—obliquely, admittedly, but with what is at the time an unmistakable proper name—as a predecessor of his own philosophical project. Furthermore, and perhaps even more importantly, this conceptual reference to Marcien Towa appears earlier than the critical allusions to philosophy as the “secret of the secret” of Europe supposedly directed against him. Let us now examine how this plays out in the text and what it implies.

An Overtly Claimed Filiation

Exposition

The first sentence of the third paragraph of the preface to *Muntu in Crisis* is probably the only place in the entire book where Eboussi Boulaga overtly claims affiliation with any philosophical tradition.³⁰ As far as our subject of study is concerned, this solves half the mystery we are dealing with because while Eboussi Boulaga, to some extent, succeeds in concealing whom he *attacks*, he nevertheless explicitly mentions those he *follows*. Their identity is, therefore, no secret. In fact, it is revealed from the outset of the book when the Master of Yorro writes: “The first part of this book sets out to describe the constitution of what we call, *after others*, ethnophilosophy” (Eboussi Boulaga, *La crise du Muntu* 7. Emphasis added).

Remarks

The English rendition of this sentence reads slightly differently, in a way that unfortunately obscures the original intention. Indeed, *Muntu in Crisis* (1) reads: “The first part of the present book sets itself the task of describing the formation of what has been dubbed ‘ethnophilosophy’.” In this entirely new sentence, the original filiation is lost—or purposely concealed—and the author is no longer sympathetic—or at least does not claim to be—to those who have labeled a certain practice ethnophilosophy. *Muntu in Crisis* thus creates a—let us say critical—distance between the author and whomever he is referring to. In contrast, *La crise du Muntu* distinctly situates the author in the continuation of an initial movement to which he is sympathetic. That movement is not only understood by Eboussi Boulaga as the mere *naming* of a situation but, moreover, as its *critique-and-criticism*, in a way that establishes a necessary relation between the two enterprises. This allows us to rule out a first, obviously fanciful hypothesis.

Invoking Paulin Hountondji's later clarifications on the authorship of the term 'ethnophilosophy,' an enthusiastic and somewhat pedantic critic might object that Eboussi Boulaga is referring, in this sentence, to Kwame Nkrumah. Indeed, Hountondji has explained, in a short article in part excerpted from what can be considered his intellectual biography—however, twenty years after the publication of his major book—that although “[m]any have believed and continue to believe that the word *ethnophilosophy* is a neologism created by Towa and myself” (Hountondji 112. Original emphasis), the first known occurrence of the word is in Kwame Nkrumah's Ph.D. project. The word *ethno-philosophy* appears, in English, in the subtitle of this unfortunately unfinished work: “Mind and thought in primitive society: A study in ethno-philosophy with special reference to the Akan peoples of the Gold Coast, West Africa.” As Hountondji appropriately notes, Nkrumah did not endeavor to define *and* criticize a particular and relatively new way of practicing philosophy. Instead, he “attempted, in the early 40s, and with the approval of his thesis advisor, E. A. Singer, to promote a new discipline—ethnophilosophy—in taking as a model certain areas of specialization already recognized in cultural anthropology, notably ethnobotany, ethnozoology, and ethnobiology, of which the generic concept would only appear formally at a later time” (118). Eboussi Boulaga, whose book was written in the early 1970s, was certainly unaware of this, as were arguably all the other protagonists involved in the quarrel over ethnophilosophy, including Hountondji himself. Furthermore, even if one assumes that Eboussi Boulaga was aware of Nkrumah's doctoral project, his use of the word does not align with that of Nkrumah. Therefore, Eboussi Boulaga does not name the object of his analysis *after* him. One inevitable conclusion that any consequent reader must then face—when they do not draw it—directly follows from this: under Eboussi Boulaga's pen, the term *ethnophilosophy* does not refer to Nkrumah, and *Muntu in Crisis* never considers this possibility. Fortunately, a second, more realistic option exists, namely that Eboussi Boulaga subscribed to the common agreement of his time that Hountondji and Towa had coined the term *ethnophilosophy*. This might explain why he only writes that he uses the phrase “*after* others” without further clarification. I can think of only one reason to make sense of the absence of additional details without calling into doubt the author's good faith,³¹ and that is to postulate that such a clarification was not needed because the subject, here, the term ethnophilosophy, was supposed well-known to the author's audience.

As a matter of fact, Eboussi Boulaga had already used this line of defense when confronted with a contradictor who reproached him for not revealing his sources and deliberately concealing what he owed to his peers. One of the alleged cases of this misappropriation concerns Eboussi Boulaga's supposedly fraudulent use of the term “rigid designator” in one of his books (see Eboussi Boulaga, *À contretemps* 242–243).³² Eboussi Boulaga's response (Eboussi Boulaga, “*Adversus Bidimam!*” 101. My translation) invokes “The use of quotation marks, the technical nature of the discussion, [and the] context” in *À contretemps*. His use of the term “ethnophilosophy” in the preface to *Muntu in Crisis* shares many points of similarity with his use of the term “rigid designator” in those disputed pages, to the extent that his defense against Bidima can be reproduced here on his behalf and almost *in extenso*.

Here, too, one must pay attention to the *technical nature of the discussion*, its *context*, and in the absence of quotation marks,³³ to the *mention* “*after* others,” which functions as *de facto* quotation marks as it signals that the author acknowledges borrowing his terminology from some predecessors. However, since the term ethnophilosophy, in the context of Eboussi Boulaga's work, does not only relate to a mere act of naming but is necessarily tied to a spirit that accompanies that very act, the French adverb *après* that Eboussi Boulaga uses bears two different but complementary meanings: it reads as *after* as well as *following*. Hence, in the preface to *Muntu in Crisis*, Eboussi Boulaga explicitly claims filiation because he uses not only the term but also the concept of ethnophilosophy, not only *after* but also *following* “others.”

From the above, it is child's play to identify the authors covered by this all-encompassing term "others" when we recall the specific and decisive role that the term *ethnophilosophy* plays in contrast with "others," namely that of establishing something like a "rigid designation," as Kripke³⁴ has put it. In other words, the term *ethnophilosophy* here mimics the function of a rigid designator because it refers in proper—that is, as a matter of necessity—to specific real people whose *proper names* are too well known to be mistaken, among them Marcien Towa. As with Kripke and the term "rigid designator," Eboussi Boulaga's use of the expression 'ethnophilosophy' is not about reinventing the wheel but blending in with a tradition.³⁵ Clearly, the rigidity of the term 'ethnophilosophy' contrasts with the flaccidity of the expressions 'secret' and 'secret of the secret,' as the latter do not refer *by necessity* to Marcien Towa (or anyone else for that matter). In the first case—which establishes a filiation—the question of the reference is solved; in the second—which relates to a criticism—there is a further need for exegesis.

Concluding Remarks

As stated, this article's goal was relatively modest as it only wished to set the stage for further discussion. Before someone raises this point, let me clarify that I readily acknowledge that some key points have been left untouched. For example, although I have claimed that Eboussi Boulaga follows Hountondji and Towa, I did not specify the extent to which this claim is valid. In other words, I did not discuss the details of this filiation. The reason for this limitation is simple: such an enterprise necessitates that we venture further into the book, particularly in its second and third parts. However, to ignite the reader's imagination, here are a few clues that will help clarify this matter. First, I must reinforce that substantial agreement does not preclude minimal disagreement. This is because—this is the second clue—there are several layers or orders of agreement, some being more fundamental than others. Finally, concerning the critique-and-criticism of ethnophilosophy, whether by Hountondji, Towa, or Eboussi Boulaga, there is a need to distinguish between diagnosis and prescription. The term ethnophilosophy points to a diagnosis, whereas (Eboussi Boulaga's remarks on) the fetishism of philosophy relate(s), in this case, to a fundamental aspect of a particular prescription with respect to this diagnosis. And as diagnosis and prescription do not collapse into one another, one can agree here and disagree there. With these reservations in mind, I can summarize the preliminary findings of this brief investigation in the preface to *Muntu in Crisis*.

I hope to have succeeded in providing a solid refutation of the common agreement that Eboussi Boulaga criticizes Towa in *Muntu in Crisis* by showing that although they might direct the reader's attention to Marcien Towa, the alleged "talking points" Eboussi Boulaga uses are not conclusive to establish a criticism of the latter because their context does not correspond to that of Towa. On the contrary, evidence from the preface establishes that Eboussi Boulaga situates himself in Towa's (and Hountondji's) footsteps regarding the critical diagnosis of a particular way of practicing philosophy in dominated societies of Africa when he explicitly claims filiation with him. Moreover, the context of his criticisms of ethnophilosophy and the fetishism of philosophy aligns with Marcien Towa's argument, which, as I have shown, does not recommend the adoption of (European) philosophy "without suspicion nor doubt." In his preface, Eboussi Boulaga thus already seems to make it clear that he does not oppose and does not intend to fundamentally oppose Marcien Towa, if, at all, this preface is written following the Hegelian model, as one might be entitled to suspect.

Hence a result, albeit preliminary, since it must be confronted with the book itself: either Eboussi Boulaga does not criticize Marcien Towa because he does not target him (in which case ignoring Towa is a feature of the book justifiable in itself), or Eboussi Boulaga does not criticize Marcien Towa because he misses him miserably (in which case this so-called criticism is a serious flaw). In the first case, this article can and should be read as a defense of Eboussi

Boulaga against his detractors; in the second, it is a defense of Towa against Eboussi Boulaga. In both cases, however, my analysis serves the truth that Eboussi Boulaga's argument has nothing to do with Towa. I surmise, nevertheless, that this is only the beginning of a debate, as we have just opened a case, and that no one will admit to having been knocked out. At least, with the approach endeavored here, my contenders will now also have to substantiate their claim. If they dare to do so, that will undoubtedly be another victory for the truth.

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Notes

- ¹ All translations of this text are mine. See also Ajari (*La dignité ou la mort* 215). It should be noted that the term "voluntarism" appears in *La crise du Muntu* on page 99 but is absent from *Muntu in Crisis*, where it would normally have appeared on page 96.
- ² These views display several rather obvious shortcomings. First, as far as Marcién Towa is concerned, it is incorrect to say that he "adopts" Western philosophy, particularly Hegel's philosophy, as if his "adoption" was uncritical and dogmatic. As we shall see, Towa is a fierce critic of Western philosophical practices, including that of Hegel. Secondly, and in the same vein, Towa does not consider that Western philosophy and African philosophy should be opposed to the extent that African emancipation could learn nothing from Western philosophy and should, therefore, ignore it as something irrelevant to the realization of its goals. Thirdly, with regard to Eboussi Boulaga, it is unclear whether Akoa Bassong is interpreting or expounding the Master of Yorro's thoughts. For the reader unfamiliar with *Muntu in Crisis* may think, from the above lines, that Eboussi Boulaga explicitly mentions the name of Towa in his book and links his theory to institutionalized philosophy. However, since Eboussi Boulaga never mentions Towa in his book, Akoa Bassong's opinions must be presented for what they are, namely, Akoa Bassong's opinions, to avoid any confusion with Eboussi Boulaga's own opinions. Fourthly, it is easy to see that Akoa's views need further elaboration.
- ³ This is how Norman Ajari ("Née du désastre" 122), for example, understands Fabien Eboussi Boulaga's book: as a "criticism of the criticism" against ethnophilosophy.
- ⁴ This is, for example, what Charles Romain Mbele claims in his book, *Système et liberté dans la philosophie négro-africaine moderne*. He writes that "[a]lthough he does not specifically name [him]" (45. My translation), Eboussi Boulaga nevertheless "attacks... Marcién Towa's theses" (44).
- ⁵ See also Ajari (*La dignité ou la mort* 215).
- ⁶ Let me clarify that the absence of *substantial* disagreement is by no means the absence of *all* disagreement. However, this paper is not concerned with this second statement.
- ⁷ My analysis in this article is limited to those three pages due to considerations mainly related to the imperative of space. In fact, this study is an abbreviated extract from a much larger work, whose results it foreshadows.
- ⁸ I am sorry I have to disagree with this 'English version' of *La crise du Muntu*, and my disappointment with this book begins with its title. As a result, in this paper, I mostly depart from this book by translating myself directly from the French original. However, since this *Muntu in Crisis* is the (only) official English 'translation' of *La crise du Muntu* currently available, I thus use it as the official English title of the book while nevertheless referring implicitly, and in some cases explicitly to the original French text. In the event of an explicit reference, the English counterpart will be indicated immediately afterward, for formality reasons only. The reasons for my disapproval of this 'English version' will hopefully appear elsewhere. There, I will make the claim that *Muntu in Crisis* should be distinguished from *La crise*

du Muntu. The reader should remember this caveat when reading this article, starting with its subtitle. Additionally, because I implicitly or explicitly refer to *La crise du Muntu*, when I speak of the 'Preface' to *Muntu in Crisis*, I do not have in mind the actual preface to *Muntu in Crisis* written by Kasereka Kavwahirehi. Instead, I allude to the original French preface to *La crise du Muntu*, which is transformed, without explanation, into an 'Introduction' in *Muntu in Crisis*.

⁹ Hereafter referred to as *Essai*. Furthermore, unless otherwise stated, I am responsible for all the translated excerpts from this book.

¹⁰ Some would want to dispute the presence of the concept of *fetishism* in *Muntu in Crisis*. Kasereka Kavwahirehi (166 ff.) has penetratingly demonstrated the naïveté of this point of view.

¹¹ This sentence represents one of the many cases in *Muntu in Crisis* where the translator struggles to render the letter and spirit of the original. Eboussi Boulaga's original sentence, "Elle [La philosophie] est pensée de la différence dominatrice," conveys the idea that philosophy is the form that takes the system of Western domination based on science, industry, and technology. Philosophy brings together all these practices as their spirit, as part of a 'culture' by which the West appears different from those it dominates. Philosophy is therefore the ultimate justification for this domination and this state of affairs. The following sentences explain the ideological nature of this connection and its relation to fetishism. *Muntu in Crisis* prefers not to wrestle with this delicate situation and opts for the curious—but somewhat comforting—solution of rewriting the original, which, in this case, is not helpful at all.

¹² Numerous studies have been devoted to the central aspects of Marcien Towa's philosophy. On Marcien Towa's dialectic of the self in relation to Europe, the interested reader should take note of one of Charles Romain Mbele's most lucid pieces (Mbele, "Marcien Towa : L'idée de l'Europe et nous"). Recent works on Marcien Towa—unfortunately all in French—include volumes by Mbede (*Marcien Towa, théoricien de la révolution africaine*), Mintoumè (*Marcien Towa: progrès scientifiques et émancipation des peuples*), and Ayissi (*La philosophie de la libération et de l'émancipation de Marcien Towa*). As I do not intend to be exhaustive on this point, I do not mention less important contributions.

¹³ On Hegel's dialectics and its characterization as 'positive,' see Adorno (*Hegel: Three Studies; Negative Dialectics*).

¹⁴ This is the central assertion of all positive dialectics, whether between subject and object or universal and particular.

¹⁵ On what Marcien Towa means by culture, see Towa (*Identité et transcendance* 202 ff.).

¹⁶ In 1968, for example, Towa argued—mainly against Senghor—that "industrial civilization" is not synonymous with European culture. This particular position, which he maintained throughout his life, invalidates the criticism that he approached science and technology as fundamentally European practices, intimately related to the European being, probably outside history, since ontology or biology are the only places—I can think of—where such a connection can be firmly established and sustained. Now, Towa explicitly refutes the hypothesis of a biological origin of culture (Towa, "Civilisation industrielle et négritude" 33), which leaves him only with historical justifications for making sense of the origin, but especially the plurality, and diversity of cultures. This is precisely the path he follows in this text and several others, notably *Identité et transcendance*.

¹⁷ See Towa ("Principes de l'éducation coloniale" 29; *Essai* 24).

¹⁸ The same analytical lucidity indeed prevails—at least intentionally—in Eboussi Boulaga's *Muntu in Crisis*. The author, indeed, contends that, whether concerning philosophy or science and technology, the mastery demonstrated by the master is "acquired by doing, through history, and not as a gift from nature" (Eboussi Boulaga, *La crise du Muntu* 8/Eboussi Boulaga, *Muntu in Crisis* 2).

¹⁹ Towa (*Essai* 23) precisely asks: "If it is true that the thesis of the Western exclusivity of philosophy leads to the legitimization of Western imperialism, is it not normal that the negation of imperialism also leads to the negation of this thesis?"

²⁰ Towa agrees with Gusdorf to such an extent that he radicalizes his views. The result is a funny situation: in many respects, what seemingly starts as an agreement ends up as an outright opposition.

²¹ See what was said above about my use of this concept.

²² This theme is developed in the first chapter of the second part of *Muntu in Crisis* (Eboussi Boulaga, *La crise du Muntu* 87 ff/Eboussi Boulaga, *Muntu in Crisis* 83 ff.). Eboussi Boulaga's approach can be compared to that of Marcien Towa (see Towa, "Principes de l'éducation coloniale"). This article is to be read as and in the continuation of a previous reflection (see Towa, "La fonction normale de l'éducation dans la Nation"). Thus, it may be worth taking note of Charles Romain Mbele's critical remarks about

this concept of 'School,' as used in *Muntu in Crisis* (see Mbele, "Métaphysique du marché universel : une critique historique, politique et culturelle" 70, 73). One will then compare this understanding with that of Joseph Teguezem and Ramsès Nzenti Kopa (109 ff.) and Eddy Mazembo Mavumbu (67, 76), who uses this concept to criticize in return Eboussi Boulaga.

²³ *Muntu in Crisis* does not conform to the original but offers a rendition that is nevertheless interesting for its striking clarity and simplicity. Indeed, this second book reads: "In the second part, as we find out, the end of our predicament does not lie in the *uncritical embrace* of philosophy as it is taught at schools in the West" (emphasis added), which is more an interpretation than a proper translation of the original French text. This occurs throughout the text—with mixed results—offering the reader familiar with the original French several instances of *lapsus transferendum*.

²⁴ A crucial clarification must be made here. The proponents of this position—namely, the criticism of ethnophilosophy—might not belong to the conceptual territory that covers this category in Eboussi Boulaga's discourse. In any case, with Eboussi Boulaga, someone does not need to be a Muntu for maintaining and exhibiting a fetishized relationship with philosophy.

²⁵ However, the reader cannot know that before entering the book, as the preface says nothing about the orientation of the analysis.

²⁶ It should be remembered that in this article we are only interested in the preface to Eboussi Boulaga's book. Because of this, I consciously resist the urge to go further into the book to see and show how this criticism is carried out in its second part. However, I can already reveal that Eboussi Boulaga's criticism seems to follow more closely—albeit under the constant and convenient veil of anonymity—the work of authors different from Marcien Towa.

²⁷ This only remark reveals how useless the question of the authors targeted by Eboussi Boulaga is if it does not relate to a more important issue.

²⁸ This is not to say that Eboussi Boulaga couldn't have had someone or something in mind as a reference or target. But since I am not a mind reader, I cannot go down that road.

²⁹ In contrast to this, Negritude, for example, is explicitly mentioned at least twice in Eboussi Boulaga's book as a position the author repudiates (see Eboussi Boulaga, *La crise du Muntu* 47, 178/Eboussi Boulaga, *Muntu in Crisis* 44, 179). A close examination of the references to this movement, the accompanying terminology, and the context in which they are used reveals that Eboussi Boulaga criticizes precisely the Senghorian variant of this doctrine. No one—hopefully—would object that this stance situates him, as I will be arguing below, in the continuity of Marcien Towa. As this is beyond the scope of this article, I can only direct the interested reader, in addition to the pages mentioned above, to the section titled "Rhetoric as Philosophy" (33 ff./28 ff.). They will then compare these views with what Marcien Towa says about Senghorian Negritude, whether in his *Essai* (24 ff.) or other works (Towa, *Léopold Sédar Senghor : Négritude Ou Servitude ?; Poésie de La Négritude*).

³⁰ For comparison, they are several instances in *Muntu in Crisis* where Eboussi Boulaga refers to Socrates, for example. However, the evocation of this name is a strategy by which Eboussi Boulaga reflects either on (European) philosophy, his relationship to this discipline, or his own philosophical practice. Yet, this is more a way of mediating his discourse than clearly claiming filiation with him. As such, even if it could appear to some commentators that Eboussi Boulaga practices philosophy according to the Socratic model—others evoke the Hegelian scheme—he, himself, never writes that his practice of this discipline *follows* that of Socrates—or Hegel. Thus, establishing a filiation between Socrates and Eboussi Boulaga is, at best, the result of exegesis and not a personal statement by the second author. This, of course, does not by any means undermine the relevance of such an exercise beforehand.

³¹ While this might be relevant to some extent and in several respects, the thrust of the present study does not require us to postulate any bad faith on Eboussi Boulaga's part. I reserve the right to pursue this line of explanation elsewhere where it would be more meaningful and beneficial.

³² See Bidima (212) for the criticism.

³³ This seems more like a misprint than a clear typographic choice because it is, so to speak, 'corrected' by *Muntu in Crisis*.

³⁴ See Kripke (*Naming and Necessity*).

³⁵ As to what it means, in Eboussi Boulaga's words, to inhabit a tradition, I direct the reader to the second Chapter of the third part of *Muntu in Crisis*. They will discover—or, hopefully, only recall—that it never entails the crude acceptance of what is.

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Philosophical Counselling as a Method of Practising Contemporary African Philosophy: Setting the Context for a Conversation between Serequeberhan and Chimakonam

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Abstract: Philosophical counselling is typically conceptualised as a praxis going beyond academic and theoretical philosophy. However, two problems soon follow, namely the lack of agreed-upon methods and a substantial neglect of different philosophical traditions informing its practice. In this article, I propose reconceptualising philosophical counselling as a distinct method through which academic philosophy can be practised. This allows me to introduce an understanding of African philosophy, inspired by African philosophers Chimakonam and Serequeberhan, that might encourage the philosophical counsellor to render academic philosophy more applicable to the counselee. Moreover, it allows for embodied voices talking from an embedded African lifeworld to create new and more relevant concepts that emerge from that lifeworld.

Keywords: philosophical counselling, African philosophy, conversationalism, hermeneutics, Tsenay Serequeberhan, Jonathan Chimakonam

Introduction

The philosophical counselling discourse remains unsettled on whether philosophical practitioners should have methods. Some argue that there should be a single method for its practice (e.g., Cohen 113–114), others argue for various methods (e.g., Pollastri 109), or some tend to outright reject method (e.g., Achenbach 11; Schuster 4–5). Due to the numerous conceptualisations of its practice, finding consensus regarding this issue remains contentious. Nevertheless, this allows for creative interpretations and applications of methods. Incorporating different methods from various philosophical traditions can thus potentially improve the counselee's way of being, especially by providing fresh insights and perspectives. The philosophical counselling discourse, however, is still relatively impoverished because the inclusion of traditions beyond Western philosophy remains largely under-explored. Some expansionary changes have been made, but African philosophy has received almost no attention in the discourse. Pilpel and Gindi, in one of the few articles on African philosophy and philosophical counselling, suggest that Ubuntu and sage philosophy have the most therapeutic potential among the various notions of African philosophy (72–76). Beyond this, African philosophy is mentioned rarely in conjunction with philosophical counselling. There is also only one philosophical counsellor whose practice is inspired and informed by African philosophy (see Broodryk). The present article, consequently, adds to the sparse literature of African philosophy in philosophical counselling, focusing particularly on African philosophy as a praxis.

One possible approach to resolve the present dearth in philosophical counselling discourse would have been to incorporate additional philosophical schools of thought akin to the ap-

proach taken by Pilpel and Gindi (72–76). However, this approach lacks much-needed nuance, particularly when bearing in mind the reasons for the persistent neglect of African philosophy in the discourse and the subsequent problems stemming from mere *indigenous inclusion*, that is, the notion that, in this case, African philosophers should justify their own entry to the status quo (Gaudry and Lorenz 219). The neglect is thus not immediately seen as a problem from the perspective of, say, Western philosophers. This problem remains insufficiently acknowledged in the philosophical counselling literature.

Cognisant of these problems, I propose a different approach concerning the incorporation of African philosophy into the philosophical counselling discourse. I contend that the current problem resides in how philosophical counselling is conceptualised, especially when considering it as a distinct field *in* philosophy. As noted, this leads one directly to the problem of method(s) – what methods should the philosophical counsellor use, how are these methods different from academic philosophy and psychotherapy, and so on. And more importantly, it leads to and maintains the current neglect of African philosophy. In contrast, and as a solution to both these problems, I propose reconceptualising philosophical counselling as a *method* in and of itself. Various philosophical counsellors align with this somewhat unarticulated position when they claim that philosophising is the sole objective of philosophical counselling (e.g., Schuster 5, 23; Weiss 16). Through the proposed reconceptualisation, I explicitly align myself with this position.

Various implications follow, as will be discussed below, but the principal implication is worth mentioning here. Understanding philosophical counselling as a method highlights the inherent imperative that its practice should be informed and influenced by philosophical traditions embedded and situated in specific lifeworlds, in this case, the African lifeworld. This allows me to conceptualise philosophical counselling in such a manner that one can *practise* contemporary African philosophy beyond the boundaries of academia, creating new concepts for understanding.

There are numerous schools of thought and approaches to African philosophy. In this article, I propose a particular understanding of contemporary African philosophy based on the work of contemporary African philosophers Tsenay Serequeberhan and Jonathan Chimakonam. As a point of departure, I take seriously Serequeberhan's notion of African philosophy as a critical hermeneutic or interpretation of the contemporary African situation. An indispensable focus is on grasping and understanding the current situation, which is temporally and spatially located. This position necessitates the creation of new and more relevant concepts. I therefore turn to Chimakonam, who proposes a method for practising African philosophy that potentially leads to these new concepts being created from the embedded lifeworld of the practitioner through *conversationalism*. Taking this method seriously allows me to underscore the necessity of collaborative philosophising.

I structure the article as follows. In the first section, I briefly discuss contemporary philosophical counselling. By doing so, the deficiency of different traditions informing its practice will become apparent. Secondly, I delve into the resulting need for African philosophy in philosophical counselling with the aim of providing adequate responses to the specific needs of the counselee located in different contexts. In the third section, I introduce my preferred reading of African philosophy by setting the context for a conversation between Serequeberhan and Chimakonam. An understanding of African philosophy emerges that emphasises an embodied voice articulating concrete problems originating from those embedded in the African lifeworld. In the fourth section, I discuss three implications of the reconceptualisation of philosophical counselling as a method, viz., (i) the search for methods becomes obsolete, (ii) academic philosophy is made relevant to the public, and (iii) philosophical counsellors qua philosophers become intimately aware of the needs of those situated and embedded in a concrete lifeworld. In the last section, I showcase how this understanding of African philosophy can be practised through philosophical counselling, focusing on concept creation from and relevant to the concrete African lifeworld.

Contemporary philosophical counselling and its deficiencies

It is generally accepted that philosophical counselling has as many interpretations as there are practitioners (Marinoff, *Plato* 37; Raabe, *Philosophical* xix; Tillmanns 2). Some have stated that philosophical counselling is a variant of psychotherapy (Mills 1); some hold the view that all talk therapy is essentially philosophical counselling (Raabe, *Philosophy's Role* 3–4); and yet for others, philosophical counselling is an alternative to therapy and not another type of therapy (Schuster 75). Most of these debates centre around the problem of method(s) and outcome(s), viz.: should the philosophical counsellor have a method, and what should the outcomes of her practice be? Some have suggested that philosophical counselling, like philosophy, should have multiple methods and approaches (Pollastri 109). Its practice seems to be characterised by a multiplicity of understandings, sometimes vastly different from each other. Peter Raabe (*Philosophical* xviii–xix) captures this diversity in a fitting metaphor in which philosophical counselling is likened to a roll of yarn in which there is no essential centre but merely various diverging strands.

Keeping this in mind, a couple of descriptive characteristics can be mentioned as a kind of point of departure to understand its practice. Philosophical counselling usually pertains to the dialogue between a philosophical counsellor and counselee about philosophical problems/questions arising in the counselee's life. This is *philosophical* because the ensuing discussion utilises the philosopher's skills and knowledge in philosophy; and *counselling*, in that there is an intentional meeting between the philosophical counsellor qua philosopher and the counselee in a specific setting. The philosophical counsellor, usually a trained philosopher with a PhD or master's degree, therefore, facilitates a philosophical dialogue that goes beyond a mere informal discussion with the aim of edifying the counselee's life (Marinoff, *Philosophical* 299). This description, however, is still relatively vague in terms of what precisely philosophical counselling is. It thus behoves me to provide a minimal understanding of its practice. To do this, I briefly focus on two imperative elements, namely, a hermeneutical happening and collaborative philosophising.

Philosophical counselling is characterised by a hermeneutical happening in which the philosophical counsellor becomes, so to speak, united and entangled with the counselee's problem/question (Raabe, *Philosophical* 133; Schuster 38). That is, the counselee's problem/question becomes a philosophical problem that needs interpretation and critical consideration. The outcome of this interpretation is to provide the counselee with a new philosophical framework through which she can potentially better understand her current situation. Importantly, this understanding does not rely on uncovering underlying truths through the one-sided expertise of the philosophical counsellor. Instead, the focus is on the process of collaborative philosophising through which the very confrontation of the philosophical counsellor and the counselee leads towards a "fresh impulse" of the situation (Allen 11–12; Raabe, *Philosophical* 143–144; Schuster 38). The result of this endeavour does not reside in the philosophical counsellor or in the counselee. It is only engendered through the interconnected and dynamic engagement of the philosophical counsellor and the counselee, who both impart important contributions.

This understanding relies on the philosophical counsellor having experience and knowledge of various schools of thought and traditions of philosophy to disclose all that philosophy can offer to the counselee (Raabe, *Philosophical* 214). However, mostly Western philosophy informs and influences philosophical counsellors' practices (e.g., Marinoff, *Plato* 52–79, 275–288; Schuster 27–70). Different philosophical traditions have slowly been included in the literature of philosophical counselling (e.g., Marinoff, *Plato* 53–57, 301–304; Pilpel and Gindi 68–82). Nevertheless, two problems remain. Firstly, this inclusion is happening on a small scale and at a slow pace. African philosophy, for example, remains mostly overlooked and underexamined. And secondly, the mere addition of different voices to counter the existing lack does not sufficiently deal with, inter alia, the problem of *indigenous inclusion* (Gaudry and Lorenz 219). Simply put, the issue of dearth and exclusion is not resolved by merely adding to the problematic

status quo. This is because the burden of change and justifying its inclusion will typically come down to the newly included. The underlying assumptions maintaining the status quo remain unquestioned and in place. The philosophical counselling literature mirrors and reproduces these problems by utilising mostly Western philosophy, which still, in many cases, actively relegates other traditions to the periphery and boundary.

Recognising and justifying this overreliance on Western philosophy and the accompanying problems poses a significant challenge for contemporary philosophical counselling. If left unacknowledged, the uncritical acceptance of sameness is continually reproduced. Sparse mention of this issue is found in the philosophical counselling discourse. Looking beyond this discourse, various African philosophers and psychologists have critiqued contemporary psychotherapies for being almost exclusively based on Western theories (Ratele 97; Makhubela 9). These therapies are often adapted for and based on Western subjects subscribing to Western ways of living. We are also reminded by decolonial philosophers such as Ramón Grosfoguel that the subject in Western philosophy is usually conceptualised devoid of human characteristics in a mission to inhabit a so-called universal position speaking on behalf of everyone (89). These exclusionary tendencies are consequently reproduced in philosophical counselling, especially when the epistemic subject is mostly conceptualised as Western. A more nuanced approach to including different philosophical traditions is thus needed. It becomes necessary first to critique contemporary philosophical counselling so as to trouble and disturb its uncritical reliance on a singular philosophical tradition. This allows me to consider the need for African philosophy in the philosophical counselling literature.

The need for African philosophy in the philosophical counselling discourse

There are few references to African philosophy in the philosophical counselling discourse. In one of these few, Bellarmine Nneji states poignantly that “in many African settings [...] *there is [a] serious need for philosophical counselling*” (6. Emphasis mine). However, Nneji relies solely on Western philosophers and philosophical counsellors to introduce philosophical counselling into an African context, essentially reproducing the problem of preferring Western ways of being/living (3–4). The author does not mention the potential of including African philosophies or philosophers, especially in the African context. This seems suspect in relation to the conspicuous silence of African philosophy in the discourse. In a different context, Uchenna Okeja (112) states, for example, that “[t]here is little need to keep educating young minds in Africa about Plato’s world of forms” in lieu of indigenous knowledge systems. Extrapolating this sentiment to philosophical counselling, one can subsequently question the relevance of philosophical counselling solely relying on singular philosophies in an African context. Whilst its practice is mainly informed by Western philosophy in place of African philosophy, philosophical counselling will not have a particularly profound impact in an African context. In fact, it might do more harm than good by occluding and marginalising those who do not conform to Western ways of being by viewing the particularity of questions and problems emanating from the African lifeworld as essentially the same as those from other lifeworlds.

In their turn, Avital Pilpel and Shahar Gindi (71) are the first to mention the absence of African philosophy in the philosophical counselling discourse. They subsequently introduce African philosophy through Ubuntu and sage philosophy. According to the authors, these philosophies have the most therapeutic potential in philosophical counselling (72–76). Nevertheless, the authors do not engage with the intricacies of including the philosophies they discuss. The reasons behind the conspicuous silence of African philosophy in philosophical counselling are left insufficiently questioned and not problematised, thereby evading the issue of indigenous inclusion. Their effort, nonetheless, initiate a much-needed conversation regarding (i) the lack

of African philosophy in the literature of philosophical counselling and (ii) the appropriate approach required to incorporate African philosophy into the corpus.

The lack of African philosophy in the philosophical counselling discourse juxtaposed against the reliance on Western philosophies and philosophical counsellors in an African context is especially problematic regarding the creation of new concepts and the disclosing of different ways of being/living. Potentially valuable contributions are subsequently not incorporated because the conversations are not considered or facilitated. Moreover, the manner of incorporation is also not sufficiently addressed, subsequently recolonising African philosophy by still preferring and maintaining Western philosophical concepts and frameworks as paradigms (Sands 373–374). It is apparent that there is a dire need to incorporate African philosophy into the discourse, but one should be cognisant of how this is done. Additionally, it requires an understanding of African philosophy that is continually situated and contextually aware not to perpetuate the abovementioned problems. I now turn to two African philosophers who allow me to facilitate this mindful position and the subsequent reconceptualised notion of philosophical counselling as a method.

A particular reading of African philosophy: setting the context for a conversation between Serequeberhan and Chimakonam

Various approaches and diverse schools of thought give rise to multiple understandings of African philosophy. As I introduce a reading of African hermeneutic and conversational philosophy, I am also cognisant of the numerous understandings of these philosophies in the discourse. As a theoretical point of departure, I take seriously the understanding of hermeneutic philosophy proposed by Serequeberhan, which is cognisant of the questions and problems stemming from and responding to a concrete lifeworld. I also take seriously the strand of conversationalist thought proposed by Chimakonam through which the situated and contextualised conversation recognises and honours the embodied voices of its embedded participants. I contend that these authors allow for a concretised interpretative actualisation ensuing from a specific lifeworld, cognisant of the questions and problems pertaining to the specific context. Subsequently, new concepts might be created that can better help with understanding and disclosing new ways of being/living. However, these authors have garnered some critique in the wider literature of contemporary African philosophy. These critiques can nonetheless be appreciated to help the ensuing conversations become more nuanced and refined. With that in mind, I briefly discuss my reading of the two chosen authors.

Serequeberhan's African hermeneutic philosophy is presented as a response to the contemporary African situation, with the subsequent goal being a critical interpretation or understanding of what it means to be situated in the African lifeworld (Serequeberhan, *Hermeneutics* 118). "Contemporary" and "African" here simply refer to the period in which the philosopher is historically situated and the specific geographical lifeworld from where these interpretations are affected and actuated (*Existence* 11; *Philosophy* 33). The contemporary African situation for Serequeberhan, though, is one characterised by neo-colonialism in which the previously colonised is situated – a deplorable situation affected by the residue of colonialism's forceful imposition of its own history, destroying indigenous ways of living (*Hermeneutics* 21, 24; *African* 44). This sentiment is echoed by various African philosophers who enunciate the need for philosophies to have an acute awareness of problems and questions arising from the concrete African lifeworld (e.g., Chimakonam, *Conversational* 15; Sogolo 97). If ignored, the disclosing of new ways of being/living and the creation of new concepts are stifled, and the philosopher becomes somewhat irrelevant to her society by mirroring a context with different sets of questions and answers.

The task of the African philosopher then becomes one of addressing and understanding this deplorable neo-colonial situation with the aim of transcending it by constructing a new vo-

cabulary (Serequeberhan, *Hermeneutics* 9; *Existence* 36). Serequeberhan is acutely aware of the problems pertaining to philosophies upholding and relying on quasi-universal frameworks. At length, he discusses the problems of exclusion and occlusion in the work of ethno- and professional philosophers. The subordination of Africans stems from and is maintained by either valorising negative stereotypes, as was done by some ethnophilosophers such as Léopold Senghor, or by claiming that African philosophy is merely the practice of Western philosophy by Africans, such as the claims by Paulin Hountondji (Serequeberhan, *Hermeneutics* 6–7). The critique of these philosophies boils down to disregarding the contemporary situation in which the previously colonised are situated.

In contrast, Serequeberhan proposes that the African philosopher has a double task, one that is at the same time critically destructive and creatively constructive; instantiated by, firstly, critiquing Western-centrism, and secondly, constructing a new framework that incorporates both the particularised Western philosophy and what is deemed valuable from the past/history. This is somewhat concretised through a process of “sifting and sieving” and a “filtration and fertilisation” in which the past is critically appropriated, and philosophies stemming from beyond the concrete African lifeworld are organically indigenised (*Hermeneutics* 9, 108–109; *Philosophy* 38; *Decolonization* 150). A new framework is subsequently reached involving the critique of hegemonized Western-centric ideas and the subsequent discarding of what might hinder disclosing new ways of living. By doing so, Western philosophy in its hegemonized form becomes irrelevant to understand the neo-colonial situation or postcolonial present (*Decolonization* 150). But the African philosopher can also not return to a past untouched by, inter alia, colonialism. Here, Serequeberhan relies on Amílcar Cabral’s idea of a return to the source. The African philosopher does not return to a static pre-colonial past. Instead, she returns to the “vigor, vitality (life), and ebullience of African existence” demonstrated through the various anti-colonial struggles (*Hermeneutics* 126). The aim here is to get beyond the neo-colonial situation.

Even though Serequeberhan’s philosophy serves as a significant turn, some critique is worth addressing. The first important point of critique regards the possibility of appropriating and indigenising philosophies stemming from beyond the African lifeworld. Serequeberhan’s existentially aware turn stems from the work of both Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, whom he attempts to “organically appropriate and indigenize” (*Hermeneutics* 9). Following the critique of Bryan Mukandi, one might rightfully question the possibility of this challenge because, as he states, “an Africanised Gadamer is still Gadamer” (527). Serequeberhan’s turn to Western hermeneutic philosophers is thus contrasted against the possibility of turning to other, more indigenous philosophers. But one might ask if an appropriated and indigenised Gadamer is, in fact, still Gadamer. By accepting Mukandi’s logic, one gives credence to the notion that ideas and concepts are stagnant and cannot be moulded or shaped/transformed; they essentially remain what they are. More damning, though, is that this logic again precludes the conversation from organically unfolding by trying to keep the conversation clear of outside influences.

This leads to a more severe critique stemming from Janz, who states that Serequeberhan’s hermeneutical approach in fact closes down the possibility of further interpretation as he relies on too fixed notions regarding the deplorable neo-colonial situation (Janz, *Alterity* 227). African philosophy merely becomes a response to this situation. The discussions stemming from Serequeberhan’s philosophy might have been closed off even before it started. A continual self-critical and dynamic interpretation is replaced by a “hermeneutic of convenience”, i.e., taking what is needed and discarding what is not useful (227). This critique carries a lot of weight as the ensuing discussions stemming from Serequeberhan can get stagnant and over-reliant on, for example, the neo-colonial situation. African philosophy is thus merely the product of this answer; it remains responsive, descriptive, and predefined (228). The ensuing dialogue or conversation is not as open as first imagined, again enclosing creative possibilities. As a response to this critique,

I turn to conversationalism as a meaningful philosophy to again open up and rejuvenate the conversation whilst keeping in mind the importance of Serequeberhan's hermeneutic philosophy that turns our attention to African philosophy being an interpretative actualisation rooted in a concrete lifeworld.

I explore conversationalism as a concrete example of a method particular to African philosophy, which, I contend, helps with going beyond the reliance on fixed readings/singular frameworks, thus improving Serequeberhan's somewhat stagnant position. Moreover, it aims to create new concepts and disclose new ways of being/living, thus keeping the link to Serequeberhan's philosophy alive. Conversationalism thus begins anew to write its own whilst looking at the past with a critical eye (re-) centring embodied voices from the African lifeworld. The aim is to create relevant concepts for those living in the African lifeworld, which might continually rejuvenate the hermeneutic or interpretative nature of philosophy.

The proponents of conversationalism methodised a specific understanding of "relationship" and "interdependence", emphasising a critical epistemic encounter aimed at creating new concepts and opening new ways of thinking (Chimakonam, *What* 115, 120; *Conversationalism* 11, 15). Underpinning this idea of relationship is the Igbo idea of *arụmarụ-ụka*, which roughly translates to either "engaging in critical and creative conversation" or "engaging in a relationship of doubt" (Chimakonam, *What* 120; Egbai and Chimakonam 181). Conversation, in this context, is understood differently. It is not used to signify an informal exchange of ideas. Instead, it emphasises a critical epistemic encounter when two embedded parties, viz., *nwa nsa* or the proponent and *nwa nju* or the opponent, continually rejuvenate the conversation through a "creative struggle" (Chimakonam, *What* 116, 119). A creative struggle is the dynamic interchange of ideas between *nwa-nsa* and *nwa-nju* through rigorous and critical argumentation and incessant disagreement, which drives the conversation forward. Both parties retain their original positions but positively transformed, in contrast to a dialogue where a synthesis or conclusion might be reached. In fact, Chimakonam contends that yielding to the demands of synthesis is a creative *surrender* when the dialogue ends (*Conversationalism* 17). In contrast, a sustained critical and creative conversation might yield new concepts and disclose different ways of being/living. This idea is captured when Chimakonam refers to the *nwa-nsa* position as having a "transgenerational life-span" due to the relentless attacking of *nwa nju* (*What* 121-122). After every attack, the proponent is obliged to reshuffle her position by creatively amending it. This action engenders new grounds for *nwa nju* to respond to, but more importantly, this serves as the fertile soil from which novel concepts might be disclosed.

I identify two initial benefits to this method that might amend the shortcoming of Serequeberhan's philosophy. Firstly, the voice of the situated participant embedded in a specific lifeworld is always recognised and honoured, emphasising the collaborative aspect of philosophising, which is somewhat neglected in hermeneutical philosophy. This leads to the second benefit: no particular voice or philosophy will be hegemonized. The metaphorical playing field remains equal. Different voices are important catalysts for further conversations, potentially strengthening their original positions.

It is crucial, however, to mention and address two glaring issues. Firstly, the concept of conversation endorsed by Chimakonam might be understood too narrowly, thus enclosing the conversation again. Conversationalism does not, for example, mention the necessity of listening, which forms part of any conversation (Janz, *Conversation* 42). Neither does it include the importance of silence, which might also produce further responses and subsequently lead to new concepts (Ibanga 82). These issues should not be seen as critiques but as shortcomings that call for serious attention. By continually refreshing the conversation, meaningful silences and the different aspects of listening might be neglected. Raabe, in the philosophical counselling context, has conceptualised the difference between a listening-to-understand and

a listening-to-critique (*Philosophical* 144). This distinction might be of utmost importance in conversationalism as confusing them can lead to merely listening-to-respond to rejuvenate the conversation. Misunderstandings and superficial conversations are bound to follow.

A more pressing issue, however, is the similarity of conversationalism to the praxis of philosophy itself (Matolino 135). That is, one might question the veracity and novelty of conversationalism as a method in African philosophy. As a result, many of the concepts used by its proponents have been critiqued as being either established concepts merely with a corresponding Igbo term (Rettová 32–33) or that they are purposefully obscured, which might, in the end, stifle conversation (Matolino 134). This critique resembles the one levelled against Serequeberhan's attempt at indigenising Western philosophers. With some thought, this critique might not seem that weighty, especially regarding the dynamic nature of philosophy. Concepts and ideas change over time and from where one speaks. Or, as Janz rightfully argues, concepts and ideas are rendered useful and usable by a place, that is, thought as rising and responding to a given situation (*Philosophy-in-Place* 481). Giving undue prominence to ideas having fixed meanings, especially by favouring one's own position, again encloses what is supposed to be an open conversation. In the next section, I briefly respond to this critique by discussing the problem of translation in philosophy. I will now turn to the rationale behind the reconceptualisation of philosophical counselling.

From methods in philosophical counselling to philosophical counselling as a method

As mentioned above, one of the central problems in philosophical counselling is that of method(s). What should the method of the philosophical counsellor be, or should her practice even have one? How are the methods used in philosophical counselling different from those utilised in academic philosophy and psychotherapy? These are some of the pressing questions in the discourse, consensus rarely being the outcome. However, this presupposes that philosophical counselling is a separate field in philosophy with its own method(s). In this section, I contend that philosophical counselling should rather be viewed as a method per se. I briefly highlight three important implications which serve as a justification for the reconceptualisation of philosophical counselling.

Firstly, the search for method(s) will become obsolete. Philosophical counsellors who adhere to the view that the only goal of philosophical counselling is to philosophise will naturally gravitate toward this position. That is, they already practice philosophical counselling as a method, even though they do not articulate this position. If one accepts the bare minimum understanding of a method being repeatable steps taken to achieve some desired outcome or goal, then viewing philosophical counselling as a method fulfils at least one of the two mentioned conditions. That being the desired outcome for practising philosophical counselling as a method is to philosophise. However, finding identifiable and repeatable steps that one can take to achieve this goal is difficult due to, amongst others, the myriad of different philosophical traditions with their own particular methods. In accordance with the tenets of conversationalism, repeatable steps might hinder the continual, active, and critical conversation. But this leads to the second implication, viz., getting academic philosophy out of the metaphorical ivory tower.

As I argued in the previous section, in accordance with Serequeberhan and Chimakonam, contemporary African philosophy should help the Africans embedded in a specific lifeworld understand their current situation living under neo-colonialism or the postcolonial present. Moreover, emphasis is placed on engendering voices conversing from a concrete lifeworld to creatively struggle, aiming at creating new concepts and disclosing ways of being that critically appropriate the past with a better future in mind. However, one might ask: how can this academic enterprise help the African living outside of the academy, possibly when (i) money is scarce and (ii) English is not a first or second language? This is where I envision philosophical

counselling to make a valuable contribution that purely academic philosophy cannot. Philosophical counselling is a direct link to the public in which the philosophical counsellor translates academic philosophy into a language the counselee can understand. The translation here refers to (i) the act of translating academic language to a language the counselee can understand and (ii) the literal translation from, say, English to the language of the counselee. The former has been dealt with in the philosophical counselling discourse (e.g., Tuedio 27). However, the latter, a well-established problem in the broader landscape of philosophy, has not yet been mentioned in the literature of philosophical counselling. That said, I contend that translating philosophy into philosophical counselling poses immense possibilities for creating new concepts, especially when the idea that philosophy needs a particular lingua franca, such as English, is given up (Janz, *Conversation* 42).

The second important implication, therefore, is that by practising philosophical counselling as a method of philosophising, academic philosophy can be made relevant to the public. For example, the work of Chimakonam and Serequeberhan, as discussed above, can be incorporated into the counselee's way of living. Understanding philosophical counselling as a separate field having its own methods might lead philosophical counsellors to search for inspiration beyond academic philosophy. Moreover, the philosophical counsellor would also need to demarcate her practice sufficiently from psychotherapy in order to justify its presence in the realm of psychotherapy or the mental health professions. Focus is thus on justifying its own practice rather than responding to the issues originating from the lifeworld of the counselee. Academic philosophy, in some sense, already deals with the concrete problems of the counselee, albeit in the metaphorical ivory tower. Both Chimakonam and Serequeberhan, for example, write about issues stemming from and responding to the concrete African lifeworld, but their works are not as accessible to the public and are written for a predominantly academic audience. Reconceptualising philosophical counselling as a method of practising academic philosophy effectively sidesteps the problem of justifying its own practice. Moreover, one does not have to look beyond academic philosophy to inform one's practice. The philosophical counsellor qua academic African philosopher, consequently, helps the counselee understand her way of being, situated in the African lifeworld, with the help of African philosophers such as Chimakonam and Serequeberhan by disclosing their work to the counselee.

At this point, it is worth addressing an anticipated shortcoming concerning the reconceptualisation of philosophical counselling as a method, especially regarding a perceived tension between the production and transmission of philosophy. From the above discussion, there is an impression that greater emphasis is placed on the transmission of philosophy in a counselling session. This idea has been touched upon in the discourse, with various philosophical counsellors emphasising the importance of an educational component, or an intentional transference of knowledge, in the philosophical counselling process (e.g., Raabe, *Philosophical* 146–148; Schuster 33). The production of philosophy through philosophical counselling conceptualised as a method, however, appears to be more problematic as it seems like its practice is restricted to unique educational situations, i.e., the transmission of philosophy. In addressing this tension, I envision conversationalism to play an important role in the creation of concepts in a distinct way, thereby constituting the production of philosophy. I elaborate on this point below in the third implication.

The third implication of conceptualising philosophical counselling as a method is that philosophical counsellors qua philosophers must be intimately aware of the problems and questions emanating from and pertaining to a concrete lifeworld. The tension between the production and transmission of philosophy via philosophical counselling as a method can be addressed more sufficiently now. Take conversationalism as an example. If it is practised through philosophical counselling, it might facilitate the creation of concepts, i.e., the production of philosophy, in

two unique ways. Firstly, as the counselee becomes an active participant in the conversation, she does not passively receive the responses of the philosophical counsellor. This amounts to philosophical texts being “prescribed”, i.e., given without much discussion, akin to the prescription of medication. And secondly, as alluded to above, the translation of philosophy in itself becomes a creative endeavour. Concepts and ideas are not static, and by translating them from either one language to another or from one context to another, a fundamentally creative act ensues. One can thus charitably interpret the translation of philosophical concepts into Igbo by the proponents of conversationalism in this light. The very moment of translation then becomes what Janz refers to as a philosophical moment (*Philosophy-in-Place* 488). Concepts can thence be refined and transformed, and new concepts might come from this act of translation. The counselee plays an integral role in this process, but she might also be affected by it, especially when the philosophy/concept is more relevant to her lifeworld.

In the last section of this article, I want to briefly defend the notion of practising African philosophy through philosophical counselling, reconceptualised as a method. The focus is on fostering an environment rich for concept creation relevant to a counselee situated in a concrete lifeworld.

Philosophical counselling as a method of practising African philosophy: concretising concept creation through creative struggles

I now return to the notion of philosophical counselling in Africa. A reworked understanding of philosophical counselling as a method of responding to philosophical problems originating from concrete lifeworlds might prove to be more helpful than contemporary philosophical counselling relying on singular traditions. Moreover, the way African philosophy is incorporated into the philosophical counselling discourse proves to be more nuanced. Rather than attempting to add to the status quo, I proposed reconceptualising philosophical counselling as a method. Two initial strengths warrant mentioning. Firstly, the status quo is not left unquestioned. As I discussed, there is an evident lack of African philosophy in the philosophical counselling discourse maintained by the continual reliance on Western philosophy. And secondly, I go beyond mere acknowledgement of the problem by proposing a novel manner to incorporate African philosophy into the discourse, viz., by reconceptualising philosophical counselling as a method through which African philosophy can be practised. In this last section, I provide an example of this reconceptualised philosophical counselling, focusing on how the ideas of a hermeneutical happening and collaborative philosophising, discussed earlier, are positively changed when situated in a conversational framework.

In short, African philosophy conceptualised in this study is an interpretive actualisation situated in a conversational framework in which the participants’ voices are recognised and honoured as speaking from and responding to a concrete lifeworld. Philosophical counselling thence becomes the method through which this idea of African philosophy is concretised and practised, thus going beyond the theoretical and abstract realm. In utilising the concepts gained from conversationalism, the philosophical counsellor and counselee can both enter the *nwa nsa* and *nwa nju* positions. In this framework, it becomes imperative that both parties partake in the dynamic and creative conversation or philosophise collaboratively. Passive prescription of texts will thus not promote a conversation understood as a critical discursive practice. Usually, a counselling session in contemporary philosophical counselling might end where a quasi-synthesis is reached when the counselee states that she understands her situation differently or that her problem is resolved in relation to the philosophy provided by the philosophical counsellor. Philosophical counselling case studies often read as follows: *Counselee P’s problem [insert problem] was resolved by incorporating philosophy [insert philosophy]*. Lou Marinoff, for example, writes that “[w]ith assistance from the Socratic method of philosophical midwifery [...] Ruth finally faced

the fact that she had prevented herself from being a writer, and had used her circumstances as an excuse" (*The therapy* 120–121). But in the proposed framework, this instantiates a creative surrender, a position in which the conversation ends as a mere informal exchange of ideas. If we take seriously the ideas of conversationalism, one might go as far as to state that there was little to no creative struggle and thus no philosophising qua a rigorous and critical conversation. Using the idea of the hermeneutical happening, the exercise of interpretation and reinterpretation is absent, or in conversational terms, there was no reshuffling of original ideas. Two questions might soon follow: (i) what is the practicality of this continual questioning in a philosophical counselling framework, and (ii) practicality aside, what is the benefit of the creative struggle for the counselee? I briefly address these questions below.

Inherent in philosophical counselling is a tension between the philosophical counsellor's philosophical commitments and the want to respond to the counselee's concrete questions/problems so as not to alienate her. One might construe this as the tension between producing and practising philosophy versus the transmission of philosophy to help answer the questions of the counselee. This tension is captured by Reinhard Dußel when he writes that the counselee "might have left in the meantime, [...] not much happier than before, but not unhappy either" (337). This anecdote signifies the tension that leads to the first question. The counselee might not always uphold the same philosophical commitments as the philosophical counsellor. With conversationalism, the counselee might not want to maintain the continual conversation by entering the *nwa nsa* position. With hermeneutical philosophy, the counselee might not want to consider a reinterpretation or a position that counters her original position. A counselee might merely request a quick solution to her philosophical predicament, whilst the philosophical counsellor qua philosopher might find the counselee's predicament a unique position demanding philosophical pondering and critical conversation.

This leads to the second question regarding the benefit of creative struggle. According to the founder of the modern philosophical counselling movement, Gerd Achenbach (3), a philosophy that does not discomfort "is not worthy of our attention". This idea is not novel, as many have noted the importance of tension in the practice of philosophy, especially regarding the creation of concepts (see, e.g., Janz, *Philosophy-in-Place* 480–481). To informally discuss or come to an agreement does not produce the desired tension. Situated in conversationalism, one might refer to this tension as a creative struggle. Practising conversationalism through philosophical counselling might thus again pit the philosophical commitment of the philosopher against the needs of the counselee. A creative struggle in a philosophical counselling session might ensue when either the philosophical counsellor or the counselee de-structs, critically interrogates or interprets a statement, question, or problem. I maintain that through this practice, even if some discomfort or intellectual tension is present, concepts might be created, entailing a greater understanding of problems/questions and one's way of being/living. Some authors have recently proposed conversationalism as being capable of confronting existential problems, thus transcending the mere theoretic and abstract realm and entering the (philosophical) counselling realm (e.g., Ogbonnaya 108). Practising conversationalism through philosophical counselling might thus positively change a counselee's life, which stems from the African lifeworld. With the help of a situated and contextualised hermeneutic, a counselee might come to a greater understanding of her way of being in the world. But more importantly, it stimulates the practice of African philosophy in a profoundly new manner and context not yet articulated in the discourse.

Conclusion

Philosophical counselling is usually conceptualised as a separate field/movement in contemporary philosophy. However, this leads to the problem of justifying and distinguishing its methods from other similar practices, like academic philosophy and psychotherapy. But a more

pressing problem follows, viz., the neglect of different philosophical traditions beyond that of Western philosophy. In this article, I argued that if philosophical counselling is reconceptualised as *a method* of practising philosophy, contra a separate movement *within* philosophy, the above-mentioned two problems dissipate. Moreover, philosophical traditions previously neglected and ignored in philosophical counselling, such as African philosophy, can no longer be relegated to the periphery. I turned to African philosophers Tsenay Serequeberhan and Jonathan Chimakonam to facilitate my understanding of African philosophy qua conversationalism and a critical hermeneutic of the current African situation. More specifically, I rely on the use of conversationalism as a method of practising African philosophy in a situated and contextually bound lifeworld in such a manner as to help understand neo-colonialism or the postcolonial present in Africa but in a philosophical counselling context. I argued that this understanding of African philosophy and the reconceptualisation of philosophical counselling facilitates an environment to, inter alia, take philosophy from the abstract and theoretical realm and render it applicable to the everyday life of the counselee by creating new concepts relevant to her lifeworld.

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Notes

- ¹ In using the term “Western philosophy” I do not want to imply that there is coherent practice with, inter alia, singular method(s). One might equally have used “Western philosophies”.
- ² In using the term “African philosophy” I do not want to imply that there is coherent practice with, inter alia, singular method(s). One might equally have used “African philosophies”. Moreover, various authors, such as Mogobe Ramose, use the term “Africa(n)” under protest or erasure as it is an invented and subsequently imposed term (4).
- ³ Unfortunately, in the process of finalising this paper, Dr Johann Broodryk passed away.
- ⁴ Various works still perpetuate the problem of, inter alia, indigenous inclusion. Philosophical traditions, such as African philosophy, occupy their own section on the periphery of contemporary philosophy. See, for example, the recent publication by Anthony Grayling that neatly delineates Western philosophy from “the rest” (viii). See especially Allais (207) and Cantor (728) who problematise the fictive narrative of Western philosophy developing without outside influences.
- ⁵ Writing from a South African perspective, I make two assumptions pertaining to this lifeworld: (i) high costs of education lead to unequal opportunities, directly affecting the poor and those under the yoke of neo-colonialism (Mseleku 254), and (ii) a vast majority of speakers’ first language is not English; isiZulu, isiXhosa and Afrikaans being the most frequently spoken languages (Lehohla 24).
- ⁶ Few in the literature of philosophical counselling have problematised the language in which a philosophical counselling session happens. That is, most uncritically accept that the philosophical counsellor and counselee speak the same language. In a context where the academically preferred language is different from the first language of a country, problems might arise. For example, in a South African context, English is the preferred academic language. Most, if not all, philosophy courses/modules/degrees are in English. However, isiZulu, isiXhosa, and Afrikaans are the three most frequently spoken languages (Lehohla 24).
- ⁷ See, for example, Jonathan Rée stating that “of all the kinds of translation, none is trickier than the translation of philosophy” (226).
- ⁸ As there are currently few if any efficacy studies of philosophical counselling treating any symptom/disorder, one can merely speculate what contribution academic philosophy can have for the counselee.
- ⁹ See, for example, Ran Lahav who recently proposed “Deep Philosophy”, i.e., contemplating short texts, contra critical argumentation and conversation/dialogue (“Texts for Philosophical Contemplation”).
- ¹⁰ I am grateful for a comment by an anonymous reviewer that prompted this anticipated critique.

¹¹ See, for example, Richard Sivil discussing this particular problem (205–207).

¹² See Schuster (127–180) and Marinoff (*Plato* 83–256) for more such case studies.

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